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Meguid to consult Algeria on summit

CAIRO (R) — Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdul Meguid was to leave for Algeria on Sunday for talks with President Liamine Zouari on a possible Arab summit. "Abdul-Meguid and Zouari will discuss latest developments in the Middle East and ways to support Arab common action," the league's spokesman, Talaat Hamed, said on Saturday. "Their talks will cover initiatives by some Arab leaders on holding an Arab summit to face the obstinate Israeli stand towards the peace process," Mr. Hamed added. He did not elaborate. During his three-day visit, Mr. Abdul Meguid will also express the league's support for the Algerian government in its fight against Islamist groups, Mr. Hamed said.



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جوردان تايمز يومية سياسية مستقلة عن المؤسسة الصحفية الأردنية، الراي

PNA asks U.S. senators to rethink support for Israel

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — The Palestinian National Authority has sent a letter to members of the U.S. Senate asking them to reconsider their support for Israel's position in the peace process, a senior Palestinian official said Saturday. "Standing by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, regardless of the justifications, means you are standing in the anti-peace camp," chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat wrote. The letter was written in response to a letter from 81 senators, headed by Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., and Connie Mack, R-Fla., sent to U.S. President Bill Clinton April 3rd, urging him not to use public pressure against Israel. "It would be a serious mistake," the senators wrote.

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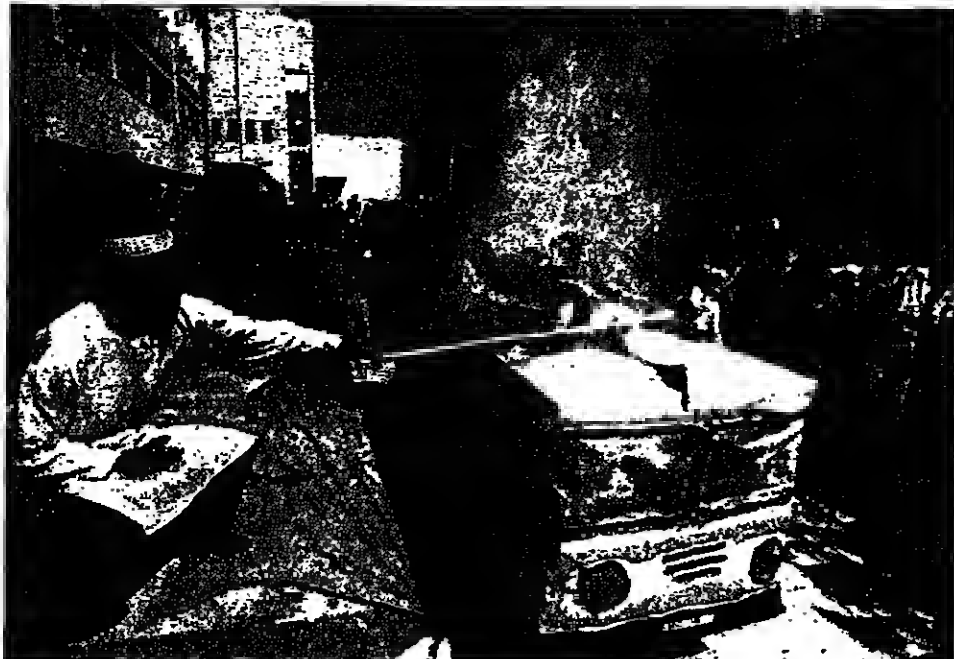
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In PNA-Hamas showdown: Awadallah, Islamist leaders arrested Thousands of Hamas supporters demonstrate against Israel

NABLUS (AP) — Thousands of Palestinians cheered as a model Israeli bus and flags were set on fire Saturday at a rally calling for revenge against Israel in the death of a Hamas bomb maker. "We will avenge the death of our beloved martyr," shouted thousands of angry fist-waving protesters. Hamas holds Israel responsible for the mysterious death last month of Mohieddin Sharif but an investigation by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) found that Sharif was shot to death by a Hamas rival as part of a power struggle. Hamas rejected the findings and accused officials in the PNA of collaborating with Israel in the killing. Those charges have led to friction and a crackdown by the PNA on Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

Rahim said, referring to the 1987-1993 uprising against Israel. Hamas has been conducting its own investigation of Sharif's death and has claimed the official probe was bogus. Palestinian security officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that Awadallah was arrested Saturday in the Palestinian-controlled city of Ramallah, West Bank. Palestinian security forces have also detained Abdullah Shami, the leader of the small Islamic Jihad faction, Nizar Rayyan, dean of students at Gaza City's Islamic University, and Ibrahim Makadmeh, a dentist who has long been on Israel's most-wanted list for allegedly helping to plot Hamas attacks in Israel. At the same time, five lower-ranking Hamas supporters were also detained in Ramallah, police said.



A masked Hamas activist places an Israeli flag on a model of an Israeli bus after exploding it and putting it on fire as thousands of Hamas activists demonstrate in the West Bank town of Nablus on Saturday (Reuters photo)

Several leaders of the two militant groups were in Palestinian custody Saturday including Imad Awadallah, thought to be the number one suspect in Sharif's death. "Iyeh Abdul Rahim, the secretary general of the PNA said Saturday that the government would not allow its findings about Sharif's death to be questioned," he said. "The Palestinian Authority will not allow any form of dual authority in its areas," Mr. Abdul Rahim said. "Hamas will not be allowed to have its own underground courts, as was the case during the intifada," Mr. Abdul

wish to announce the innocence of the these wanted men," said Ibrahim Sharif. Twenty young men wearing white shrouds covering their faces and circled the crowd of thousands at the Al Najah University campus carrying an effigy of a Palestinian martyr and holding flags. "We swear to God we will follow in the steps of Mohieddin," they chanted. Referring to Yehiya Ayyash, a Hamas bomb maker who was assassinated in January 1995, the crowds shouted "We are all Ayyash, and Sharif."

Hamas calls on PNA to free Makadmeh

CAIRO (AFP) — Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) called on the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) Saturday to free leading militant Ibrahim Makadmeh, one of Israel's most wanted men, and said his arrest dealt a blow to "Palestinian unity." Hamas protested that the PNA arrested Makadmeh even though "he has done nothing against the authority nor made accusations against it in the media" over the death of Sharif. "This shows the desire of the Palestinian Authority to put pressure on Hamas and to force the movement to let the lies pass without comment," the statement said, referring to Palestinian accusations that Sharif was killed in a power struggle within Hamas's armed wing Izzedin Al Qassam.

In victory for Trimble over rebels in his ranks: Northern Ireland's biggest party backs peace accord

BELFAST (AP) — The executive committee of Northern Ireland's biggest party voted Saturday to back the historic peace deal aimed at ending 30 years of violence — a victory for Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble.

Facing rebels in his ranks, Mr. Trimble appealed to his pro-British Protestant followers during an acrimonious five-hour meeting to accept the compromise peace accord reached Friday. He said he was delighted by their support.

Opponents argued that the agreement was a sell-out to the Irish Republican Army (IRA). But the party's 110-member executive committee voted 55-23 to back the peace deal. It will now be considered by the party's full council at a meeting in Belfast next Saturday, but Mr. Trimble said he does not expect a reversal.

"When people sit down and analyse this document I believe the result will be even stronger in our favour," he said. Mr. Trimble said he understood the deep reservations, which he also shared. But he said: "The people calling me a traitor are only a small group who have over the last number of years called everybody in this party names."

William Thompson, an Ulster Unionist lawmaker who vowed to vote "no" when the accord is subjected to a referendum May 22 in Northern Ireland, said the campaign to scrap the agreement would not end with Saturday's vote.

"We will continue to fight it all the way. Trimble may claim this to be a victory but it's anything but," he said. Mr. Trimble — whose pro-British Protestant party opposes Irish unity and is central to making the agreement work — went to the Ulster Unionists' downtown Belfast headquarters early Saturday to sell the settlement.

It was the first of many expected challenges to the historic accord. While Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom with a new assembly, the Protestants and Catholics in this new administration would be required to forge formal links with the rest of Ireland, too.

The Belfast talks chairman, former U.S. Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, won acceptance Friday from all eight participating parties after 22 months of negotiations.

But half of the Ulster Unionists' 10 members in the British Parliament have criticised or condemned outright key aspects of the compromise: early releases for IRA prisoners, a role for the IRA-allied Sinn Fein party in the new assembly, and requirements that this new administration cooperate in a North-South Ministerial Council with the Irish Republic.

"Trimble has conceded on almost every point he said he would stand on," said Mr. Thompson. "The IRA and Sinn

Fein have bombed themselves to the negotiating table, and now they can have one of their people sitting on the assembly's executive. Who would have imagined that could have happened a year ago?" he said.

A veteran Unionist lawmaker, William Ross, said the accord was not "a peace deal" but rather "a full-blown surrender to IRA demands."

Northern Ireland's only previous attempt to forge compromise was destroyed in 1974 by an Ulster Unionist split and a widespread Protestant strike.

In a BBC interview, Mr. Mitchell acknowledged that the accord he worked so hard to achieve faced fundamental obstacles that would only be cleared if Protestant and Catholic politicians engaged in "good-faith working together."

"Will the assembly be able to get itself organized? Will it be able to operate as an effective legislative body? Will the north-south bodies work to the mutual benefit of north and south?" Mr. Mitchell asked.

Rival protests outside the Ulster Unionists' headquarters illustrated how split Protestant opinion is over the wisdom of compromise.

Before the meeting began a half-dozen Protestants from a pro-British fraternal group, the Apprentice Boys, marched up to the front door and handed in a letter of protest.

"All those people didn't die since 1974 just so we could hand everything over now," said the leader of the marchers, Evangelist Alan Campbell. He said the accord would "release IRA murderers onto the streets and let the IRA hold on to its arms."

But as the meeting began, about 50 Protestants from the nearby working-class Shankill district arrived to wave banners praising Mr. Trimble's support for the accord.

Many were relatives of imprisoned members of Northern Ireland's two major pro-British paramilitary groups, the outlawed Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force, who would also win early parades if the agreement works. These protesters waved British flags and wielded placards reading "David Trimble, the leader who gave us peace" and "Support Trimble's brave decision, peace for all!"

Like Mr. Trimble's Ulster Unionists, another party critical to the process faces difficulties selling the package to its grassroots — Sinn Fein.

Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams, faces dissent from those who can't stomach the fact that the agreement leaves Northern Ireland still standing and firmly linked to Britain. Also, the Irish Republic has promised to amend the part of its constitution that claims Northern Ireland as part of its state.

the slogan "Liberté - Saotirse [the Gaelic for freedom] — it, Malion McGivern, 48, said Republicans for the first time had been granted legitimacy in their campaign for a united Ireland.

"For the first time, the Republican ideology has been legitimised by the two governments and by the unionist family, they see that republicanism is a legitimate force, I think that's very important," he said.

In East Belfast, the fier-

dom of Protestant Loyalist paramilitaries who have been responsible for a third of the 3,200 violent deaths over the past 29 years, regulars in a local pub on the famous Shankill Road had little praise for the peace agreement.

Michael, 38, who preferred not to give his last name, denounced the settlement, which is to be submitted to referendum north and south of the border on May 22, as a "bad deal."

The establishment of cross-border bodies giving Dublin a say in Northern

Ireland's affairs for the first time was unacceptable, he said. "What other country has a say in what it does?"

Although cooperation will be limited to areas such as agriculture, health and tourism, he said he was afraid that the north-south links would gradually be strengthened.

"It will cannon-ball on and before you know it you'll have them sitting and making decisions on your everyday life up here," Mr. Michael said.

But he predicted that the

Loyalist community would largely swing behind the agreement because it contained a prisoner release scheme which should allow many Republican and Loyalist inmates to be freed within two years.

"There are a lot of people who say that the deal shouldn't go through, but at the same time the prisoner issue might hold them on — it will keep boys on board," Mr. Michael said.

Fellow-Loyalist Bill Garrett, 32, joined a group of 30 Protestants who

staged a noisy flag-waving show of support for Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble outside the party headquarters in Belfast where its executive body was meeting to consider the deal.

"Everyone knew they weren't going to get everything they wanted," he said. "But people have lost too many friends, loved ones and family through the past 30 years of conflict, and what all the parties at the talks have pushed for is to hopefully bring all that to an end."

Yassin was welcome in Jordan. He did not rule out a meeting between The Hamas leader and His Majesty King Hussein.

"We cannot ignore that Ahmad Yassin is an important personality and we welcome his visit to the Kingdom," Dr. Ensour added. The Hamas leader, who was jailed for several years in Israeli prisons, was released in October following a foiled assassination attempt on the life of Hamas top leader Khalid Misha'al in Amman on Sept. 26 of last year.

Meanwhile, the government imposed a ban on publishing any news on the killing of a prominent lawyer, his son and a well-known psychiatrist in Amman last week.

Dr. Ensour said that the ban comes upon instructions "from judicial sources" to avoid infringement on the ongoing investigation of the murders of Hanna Naddah, his son Suhail and Awni George Sa'ad, who were shot to death by unidentified gunmen in Sa'ad's clinic in the Shmeisani neighbourhood.

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"We will arrest the suspects. But I do not want to give a statement on the case," the official added.

"The government does not hide anything. The public prosecutor is still working on the case and the government will not reveal anything until the investigation is over."

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Relatives prepare to bury Hajj victims as Saudi press blames unruly crowds

MECCA (AFP) — Families of 118 Muslims killed in a stampede at the annual Hajj prepared Saturday to bury their dead in the Holy City of Mecca, amid accusations pilgrims failed to heed crowd control warnings.

Two days after Thursday's tragedy during the "Stoning of Satan" religious ritual in Mina, in the Saudi Arabian desert east of Mecca, authorities have succeeded in firmly identifying only 66 of the dead.

Several pilgrims have already been buried at a cemetery known as Janat Al Maala or Heavenly Paradise, near Mecca and more relatives are expected to ask for their loved ones to be laid to rest at Islam's most sacred site.

Of the 118 who were trampled or plunged to their death on Thursday, the authorities have identified 24 Indians, nine Pakistanis, nine Turks,

seven Algerians, five Saudi nationals, four Moroccans, three Bangladeshis, two Egyptians, two Indonesians and one Kuwaiti.

Muslims believe that those who die performing the Hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam and a duty at least once in a lifetime for all who can afford it, are granted immediate entry to paradise.

The Saudi kingdom traditionally allows the faithful who die during the pilgrimage to be buried at Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad, or Medina, Islamic's second most sacred site.

The pilgrimage, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world and attended this year by 1.7 million Muslims from 100 nations, has been frequently blighted by tragedy despite Saudi efforts to control the crowds.

Before Thursday's stampede, an estimated 700,000

pilgrims had packed onto an overpass to throw stones at three pillars representing the devil, one of the final Hajj rituals.

Saudi Pilgrimage Minister Mahmoud Ben Mohammad Safar told the Al Sharq Al Awsat newspaper on Friday that the catastrophe was the result of pilgrims failing to heed advice given at the entry and exit to the pillar area.

No one in the world can deny the enormous sacrifices made by the Saudi kingdom to assure the safety of pilgrims and responsibility for the accident must be borne by those who failed to explain to pilgrims how to perform the ritual safely," said Okaz newspaper.

"It is the will of God," said Al Nadwa newspaper, adding: "The tragedy of Mina should not in any way lessen the success of efforts for completion of the pilgrimage."

Zakur Rahman, the Indian

consul in charge of the Hajj, whose country suffered the heaviest toll, said up to seven Indian pilgrims have already been buried at their families' request.

"None of the relatives have asked yet for the bodies [to be repatriated] and we think the others will be buried in Mecca," Mr. Rahman said, adding that another two or three Indians may be among the dead.

A Turkish official said the nine victims would be buried at Mecca.

Saudi Health Minister Oussama Ben Abdul Majid Shabkashi said most of the pilgrims injured during the crush had been released from hospital.

"Of the 162 injured pilgrims admitted to hospitals in Mina, Mecca and Jeddah after the stampede, only around a dozen are being kept under supervision," he told Al Ryad newspaper.



Iranian Interior Minister Abdullah Nuri addresses Tehran municipality employees Saturday, one week after Mayor Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi was arrested on corruption charges. Mr. Nuri denounced the arrest as an attempt to destabilise President Mohammad Khatami's moderate government (AFP photo)

Supporters of Tehran's imprisoned mayor mobilising for his defence

TEHRAN (AFP) — Supporters of Tehran Mayor Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, arrested a week ago on charges of "embezzlement and diverting public funds" in connection with a corruption scandal in the city government. A dozen of his aides have already been convicted and jailed.

Mr. Karbaschi's supporters warned in an open letter that "the prolongation of this situation will face the regime and the country with a serious crisis."

In a speech to mayors of the capital's 20 boroughs Saturday Mr. Nuri again denounced Mr. Karbaschi's arrest as "arbitrary."

"It is astonishing for a government official to be arrested by a judge and held like a common law prisoner dressed in a prison uniform," Mr. Nuri told the mayors.

Participants in the meeting, who included Mr. Karbaschi's wife, called for the Tehran mayor's "immediate release," IRNA reported.

Mr. Karbaschi's wife has been allowed to visit her husband in Evin jail in the north of the capital, the moderate daily Jameh reported Saturday without giving any details of when the visit took place.

Last week Faezeh Hashemi, MP and daughter of former Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, condemned in the Iranian parliament the ban on visits to the imprisoned mayor.

Mr. Karbaschi was held "in a cell with another prisoner" and "had the right to half an hour a day outside," Jameh reported.

The radical and moderate press are daily running full-page stories supporting the embattled mayor.

Nearly 700 mayors of cities and villages around Iran have called on Mr. Khatami to "not let honest administrators and people like Karbaschi be sacrificed to partisan political interests."

Student associations and political figures have threatened to call street demonstrations for Tuesday in favour of the mayor.

Conservatives struck back Friday by disrupting a sermon in Esfahan in which an imam (prayer leader) supported the mayor. Some 50 people reported to be members of the fundamentalist Hizbollah shouted "Death to Karbaschi" and "Death to Montazeri" during the sermon by Ayatollah Jaleddine Taheri.

Mr. Karbaschi, 44, was arrested a week ago on charges of "embezzlement and diverting public funds" in connection with a corruption scandal in the city government. A dozen of his aides have already been convicted and jailed.

Mr. Karbaschi's supporters warned in an open letter that "the prolongation of this situation will face the regime and the country with a serious crisis."

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Turkish troops kill 10 Kurdish rebels near Mediterranean resort

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkish troops have killed 10 separatist Kurdish rebels in two clashes near Turkey's most popular tourism resort, Antalya on the Mediterranean coast, the Anatolia news agency reported Saturday.

They mark the first major fighting in that area between security forces and rebels from the outlawed Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK), who usually operate in the country's Kurdish-dominated southeast near the Iranian and Iraqi borders.

Seven PKK members were killed and a Turkish officer badly injured in the fighting in the first clash which took place on Friday near Serik, 30-kilometre east of Antalya, Antalya Governor Husnu Tuglu told the agency. A second clash erupted early Saturday near Manavgat, 30-kilometre east of Serik. The security forces killed another three PKK rebels, Anatolia said.

The Antalya area was visited by more than three million foreign tourists last year.

The fighting reports came as a bomb exploded Friday in Istanbul injuring nine people, including three foreign tourists, near the Blue Mosque, one of the city's

Turk PM says clash won't harm tourism

ANKARA (R) — Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz said on Saturday the country's tourism industry would not be hurt by clashes between security forces and Kurdish rebels in the Mediterranean tourist province of Antalya, Anatolia News Agency quoted him as saying tourists would benefit from the military action.

"It will have good effects... because for a long time we had known they [rebels] were there. Now it is in large measure cleared up," he said.

Most clashes between security forces and the PKK have been in the mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey.

Last summer a suspected PKK rebel was killed in a botched grenade attack in the western Turkish tourist resort of Bodrum, most popular tourist sites.

No one claimed responsibility for the bombing, but Turkish Interior Minister Murat Basoglu said the PKK "might be behind" the attack.

Two Indians, one New Zealander, four Turkish civilians and two Turkish soldiers were injured in the powerful blast, which took place in a park near the Blue Mosque. None were injured critically. It was not clear if the Istanbul bombing and the PKK's unusual presence in the Antalya area were linked.

The PKK has threatened to stage attacks on Turkey's holiday resorts if the Turkish military continues operations against the group.

The rebels have been fighting the Ankara government since 1984 for an independent Kurdish state in the southeast. More than 29,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan last weekend proposed a ceasefire but also threatening to step up attacks throughout the country if the government turned down his truce offer.

Turkish Defence Minister Ismet Sezgin rejected the proposal on Thursday, qualifying the offer as a tactic and saying the government would continue with anti-PKK military operations.

Newspaper confiscated in Egypt over article

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt banned an international Arabic daily Saturday because of an article criticising the condition of minorities in the Arab World, its journalists said.

The article by Suleiman Neguib, an Egyptian Christian, ran Saturday in the London-based Al Hayat. It highlighted problems facing minorities in the Arab world, including Egypt's Christians, said the journalists, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Changes by Egyptian Christians living abroad of religious persecution in Egypt have angered the government. Christians, most of them belonging to the Coptic Orthodox Church, make up about 10 per cent of Egypt's predominantly Muslim population of 63 million.

The government has banned Al Hayat before for running articles deemed controversial.

In December, it was confiscated for publishing a statement that dealt with an interview with the leader of Al Gamaa Al Islamiyah, or the Islamic Group, which has fought the government since 1992.

Iran earthquake leaves 11 dead, over 1,500 homeless

HASSAN-KOLANGI (AP) — Families and rescue workers sifted through rubble Saturday in search of survivors of an earthquake that killed 11 people, flattened a dozen villages and left over 1,500 homeless in this remote northeastern region.

Friday's magnitude-5.9 quake destroyed over 600 homes and shook dozens of villages in an area stretching 175 km from the cities of Birjand to Gonabad in Khorasan province. More than 10 people were injured, according to officials, speaking on customary condition of anonymity.

By Saturday afternoon, authorities had ended emergency rescue work.

"We have officially stopped the search

for survivors because we believe there are no more casualties," said a government official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Shortly after the quake hit at 7:31 p.m. local time, relief workers, aided by the light of a full moon, pitched tents and distributed food, kerosene stoves and blankets to survivors. At night, temperatures drop to four degrees Celsius in the remote area which is dotted by poor villages and mud huts. The area has no access to telephones or electricity.

At the crack of dawn Saturday, some 100 aid workers picked at the rubble with shovels looking for signs of life, aided by rela-

tives of the missing who also tried to extract utensils and other belongings from the debris. Bulldozers removed piles of rubble and reopened many of the roads that had been blocked by fallen rocks.

The death toll was relatively low because the quake was preceded by a loud boom, giving many residents in this quake-prone region a chance to flee their homes, eyewitnesses said.

"There was a thunderous noise, like rocks exploding, and everyone ran out of their homes," said Mohammad Khajazi, a local grocer who has survived tremors before. "I was already outside when the earth started shaking."

Political executions top 1,500 in Iraq in 1997 — U.N.

GENEVA (AFP) — More than 1,500 political executions were believed to have taken place in Iraq last year, according to a report to be presented to the United Nations on Tuesday.

"On the basis of all available information, it is highly probable that more than 1,500 summary, arbitrary or extrajudicial executions for political purposes have been carried out throughout the year, most of them during the 'Prison Cleansing Campaign' of November and December 1997," the report said.

The report was prepared by the special rapporteur on human rights in Iraq, Max van der Stoep, for presentation to the U.N. human rights commission here on Tuesday.

Copies of the report were made available to the press Saturday.

The rapporteur, who has been refused access by Baghdad since 1992, based his report on information from victims, witnesses and others which his officers had been able to corroborate.

Referring to the prison campaign, the report said there was "strong evidence that hundreds of prisoners have been executed in Abu Ghraib and Radwaniyah prisons since August 1997."

Executions increased in November and December following a visit to Abu Ghraib prison by Qusay Saddam Hussein, head of the country's special security organisation, the report added.

The campaign "is said to have involved detainees either sentenced to death or condemned to 15 years of detention and over."

It was reported that the executions were carried out by shooting, hanging or electrocution, with relatives of the executed having to pay the value of the bullet used for the executions in order to recover the bodies.

Iran to stage major military exercises in Gulf

TEHRAN (AFP) — The Iranian navy will launch military exercises involving 15,000 men on Sunday in the Gulf of Oman, navy commander Vice Admiral Abbas Mojtahid said on Saturday.

For the first time, all three of Iran's Russian-built submarines

will take part in the nine-day manoeuvres, dubbed Ertedad or Unity, along with a dozen warships and fighter jets, he said.

"Two frigates, two personnel carrier vessels, two logistic vessels and teams of frogmen, along with 15,000 personnel of

the naval and air forces will take part in the wargame," he said, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Iran took delivery of its third submarine in February 1997, and insists that the three do not constitute a threat to regional

security.

Western military experts believe the kilo-class submarines give Iran the ability to mine navigation routes and torpedo vessels in a region that handles around one fifth of the world's oil supplies.

JORDAN TELEVISION

PROGRAMME TWO
16:10 Cartoon — The Pink Panther
16:20 Cartoon — Pumpkin Patch
16:30 French Programmes
18:00 — Skippy
18:30 — Drama — The Burden
19:00 — Le Journal
19:15 Documentary Magazine — Le Tour De France
19:30 — News Headlines
19:35 Life's Most Bizarre Moments
20:00 Documentary — The People and Places of Africa
20:30 The Ultimate Guide to Motherhood
21:10 — Drama — Renegade
22:00 — News in English
22:30 — Drama — Silent Witness
23:59 Comedy — The Upper Hand
00:30 — End of T.V.

PRAYER TIMES

04:46 — Fajr
06:07 — (Sunrise) Duha
12:36 — Dhuhur
16:12 — 'Asr
19:06 — Maghreb
20:27 — 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifheh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

4624853/4624811.
St. Afeem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 565897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932
St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifheh Tel. 5920146
The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church 771331

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

AMMAN:
Dr. Mazen Nballi 830435
Dr. Fawaz Dabbas 791155
Dr. Adnan Zaghoul 398140
Dr. Fakhri Bilbeisi 5522233
Firas pharmacy 5661912
Fendows pharmacy 778336
Al Asma pharmacy 4637055
Nairokh pharmacy 4623672
Al Salam pharmacy 4636730
Yacoub pharmacy 4644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 4637660
Najib pharmacy 847632
IRBID:
Dr. Mazen Abu Bakr 276852
Al Quds pharmacy (—)
ZARQA:
Dr. Mazen Saffarini 985832
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111
Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192 462111, 4637701
Fire Brigade 4617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Dept. 3630321
Hotel Complaints 5605800
Price Complaints 5661176
Water & Sewage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 5680100
J. Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Co. 4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 9221199
The Islamic Abdi 566631/7
Hussein Medical Centre Tel. 856813, 856856

Luzmila 4630195
Khalidi Maternity 46442816
Akileh Maternity 46424412
Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362
Malhas, J. Amman 4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071
Shmeisani Hospital 5669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 56672279
Al-Ahli, Abdi 56641646
Italian Al-Muhajreen 7710103
Al-Bashir 77511126
Army, Marka 89161115
Queen Alia Hospital 560224050
Amal Hospital 5674155

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafes Hospital (02)247100

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44) 53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone (44) 527000.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
09:30 Jeddah (RJ)
09:45 Larnaca (RJ)
10:00 Bombay (RJ)
10:05 Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
10:25 Beirut (RJ)
10:30 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
10:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
11:15 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
17:00 Brussels (RJ)
17:45 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
18:00 Paris (RJ)
18:00 London (RJ)
19:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
19:10 Athens (RJ)
19:20 Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
20:40 Rome (RJ)
20:55 Frankfurt (RJ)
23:15 Agaba, Vienna (RJ)
23:40 Paris (add) (RJ)
02:20 Cairo (RJ)
05:55 Vienna (add) (RJ)

15:40 Doha (QR)
19:00 Paris (AF)
20:25 Tel Aviv (LA)
21:40 Cairo (MS)
22:20 Istanbul (TK)
23:35 Larnaca (CY)
23:40 Beirut (ME)
01:15 Amsterdam, Beirut (KL)
04:15 London (BA)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
05:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
06:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
06:30 Larnaca (RJ)
06:45 Beirut (RJ)
06:45 Agaba, Vienna (RJ)
11:15 Frankfurt (RJ)
12:15 Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:30 Rome (RJ)
13:00 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
13:00 Paris (add) (RJ)
13:20 Athens (RJ)
13:30 London (RJ)
13:30 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
21:25 Jeddah (RJ)
21:30 New Delhi (RJ)
22:00 Vienna (add) (RJ)
22:00 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)

22:30 Cairo (RJ)
23:00 Abu Dhabi, Jakarta, Bangkok (RJ)
00:30 Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta (RJ)
01:00 Sanaa (RJ)
01:30 Damascus (RJ)
03:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
04:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
05:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

06:15 Beirut (ME)
07:15 Tel Aviv (AF)
07:30 Paris (AF)
07:35 Damascus, London (BA)
07:50 Frankfurt (LH)
12:00 Al Hudaidah (Y)
14:00 Jeddah (SV)
14:10 Moscow (SU)
14:25 Doha (GF)
14:30 Doha (QR)
21:10 Tel Aviv (LA)
22:40 Cairo (MS)
02:15 Beirut, Amsterdam (KL)
14:25 Doha (GF)
14:30 Doha (QR)
21:10 Tel Aviv (LA)
22:40 Cairo (MS)
02:15 Beirut, Amsterdam (KL)
14:25 Doha (GF)
14:30 Doha (QR)
21:10 Tel Aviv (LA)
22:40 Cairo (MS)
02:15 Beirut, Amsterdam (KL)

Home News
Prince Moha
condolences
Rights group
improve medica
NEWS I
medicine conference
What's
going
on
FILM
EXHIBITIONS
Human

Home News

Jordan Times, Sunday, April 12, 1998

3

Prince Mohammad offers condolences to Naddeh family

AMMAN (J.T.) — HRH Prince Mohammad, the personal representative of His Majesty King Hussein, Saturday called at the house of the late Hanna Naddeh to offer his condolences to the family over the death of Naddeh and his son Suheil.

Dr. Naddeh, Suheil and a prominent psychiatrist were killed in the Shmeisani area on Wednesday by unidentified parties.

Also Saturday, HRH Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid visited the Public Security Department (PSD), where he met with PSD Director General Nasouh Muhieddin to discuss the investigations into the killings of the Naddehs and psychiatrist 'Awmi George Sa'd. Prince Ra'd praised the efforts of PSD personnel to safeguard the security and safety of citizens, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, said.

Prince Ra'd on the intensive efforts being made by the PSD to identify the killers and clarify the circumstances surrounding the murder.

The bodies of the victims were laid to rest on Friday. His Majesty King Hussein Thursday visited the PSD and urged Lt. Gen. Muhieddin to speed up the investigations into the murder.

Rights group urges government to improve medical services for poor

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordan Society for Human Rights (JSHR) Saturday issued a statement calling on the government to give due consideration to health matters and improve medical services, especially for the poor and those who are not covered by any health insurance plan.

The statement commended the endeavours of successive governments to set up health centres and hospitals in various parts of the country and spend millions of dinars on this sector, something which it said reflects the state's respect for the basic requirements of human rights.

But the statement, which was issued to mark World Health Day on April 7, raised a number of questions pertaining to the level of health and medical services.

More than one-third of the country's population are not covered by any form of medical insurance system and are unable to cover the cost of proper medical treatment, the JSHR statement noted.

It called on the government to speed up the formulation of a comprehensive health insurance system that would take care of the needs of the lower classes without discrimination.

There has been growing number of complaints about the shortage of medicine at health centres, especially in the most populous regions of Amman and Irbid, despite assurances by health officials to the contrary, according to the statement. It said that diabetic patients in particular continue to complain of the shortage of drugs or their increasing prices.

JSHR said government-run hospitals and health clinics are congested and do not allow sufficient time for health workers to interact with patients, while private hospitals charge exorbitant fees, making it impossible for the poor to receive any medical help.

The statement also drew attention to mistakes committed by doctors due to negligence and incompetence and called on the concerned authorities to revise the laws and regulations governing the profession to help avoid deaths resulting from malpractice.

JSHR urged the Ministry of Health to upgrade medical services at its hospitals and health centres and give special care to students, especially in such poor regions as the Jordan Valley.

Government to discuss study on extended weekend for public sector employees

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The government will soon discuss a study by the Ministry of Administrative Development on granting public sector employees an additional day off on the weekend, a government spokesperson said Saturday.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour said the Council of Ministers will discuss the study on including Thursday as a weekly public holiday in addition to Friday for employees working in government and public institutions.

Dr. Ensour told reporters following the weekly Cabinet session that the Ministry of Administrative Development will soon finalise its study on the issue.

Preliminary results

showed that 76 per cent of Jordanians working in the public sector are in favour of a day off in addition to Friday.

The study stated that working hours would have to be increased by one hour per day to compensate for the additional weekend day. Currently, government departments close at two o'clock.

The study showed that 71 per cent of the employees surveyed favour Thursday as the extra day off.

Dr. Ensour said the plan has its "pluses and minuses."

"This subject has its pluses and minuses, but I believe that the Council of Ministers, for several reasons, is inclined to accept this proposal," Dr. Ensour said.

He added that the Cabinet

has not discussed the issue "but it is expected to debate and vote on it soon."

However, Minister of Administrative Development Bassam Emoush said he did not believe that it was a good idea to have a second day off.

Dr. Emoush said the study by his ministry was conducted upon a request by the Prime Ministry to determine the opinion of public sector employees on this issue.

"I think it is a negative proposal that does not suit our country," Dr. Emoush told the Jordan Times.

"It will create confusion in the public sector and cut the Kingdom's contact with the outside world for four days, because we would have Thursday and Friday off while they have Saturday and Sunday," the minister added.

It would have a negative impact on the economy and it would affect adversely the productivity of the employees in the country," Dr. Emoush said.

He said the majority of private sector employees surveyed said they favour the additional day in addition to the present weekly holiday.

Dr. Emoush said he did not think that the Council of Ministers would approve the proposal "because most of them do not favour it."

A senior banker said the government proposal would harm the activities of the commercial banks in the country because it would weaken their contacts with international banks and financial institutions.

"The new proposal, if approved, will reduce our

contacts with the stock markets abroad from four days to three days," banker Miflah Aqil said.

Mr. Aqil emphasised that world stock exchanges operate from Monday through Friday, a public holiday in the Kingdom, and are closed on Saturday and Sunday.

"If the government intends to approve this proposal, it should make one of the two days that follow Friday a public holiday rather than Thursday," Mr. Aqil said.

The banker said most employees and workers need two days off, which he said would give them more time to rest and would encourage domestic tourism.

"But it should be carefully studied before it is approved," added Mr. Aqil.

UNHCR, ministry sign memorandum on refugee issues

AMMAN (Petra) — The representative of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Jordan, Zobia Hassim-Ashagrie, and Minister of Interior and Natir Rashid Saturday signed a memorandum of understanding to supplement an agreement on bilateral cooperation that the two sides concluded in July 1997.

The memorandum paves the way for the two sides to work out a "proper mechanism" to deal with questions connected with refugees whose cases fall under UNHCR jurisdiction.

In preparation for the accord, Mr. Rashid had earlier ordered the creation of a new section at the Ministry of Interior to take charge of matters relating to the humanitarian needs of displaced persons.

In coordination with UNHCR and in conjunction with regional, international and local institutions, the section will follow up refugee cases with a view to repatriating or settling them.

The new section at the ministry will be charged with preparing periodical reports on refugees and displaced persons and human rights questions in Jordan.

In a statement issued Friday, Mrs. Hassim-Ashagrie commended the level of cooperation and coordination between the Jordanian government and UNHCR.

First group of pilgrims returns to Jordan from Saudi Arabia after performing Hajj

AMMAN (J.T.) — The first group of Jordanian pilgrims who performed the Hajj (pilgrimage) in Saudi Arabia has returned safely to Amman, according to Abdul Fatah Salah, secretary general of the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

Mr. Salah said the group returned on 81 buses and 35 automobiles via the Jordan-Saudi border post at Al Mudawara.

The ministry has despatched a special team to Al Mudawara to supervise

the pilgrims' return and to reimburse each for the JD25 paid earlier to the ministry as a fee against emergency services. No such services were required, according to Mr. Salah.

No Jordanian pilgrims were among those killed in a stampede on the final day of the Hajj that left 118 dead.

The victims, most of them elderly, were trampled or plunged to their deaths during the chaos Thursday in Mina, about five kilometres

from Mecca.

Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Salam Abbadi said the accompanying medical team toured hospitals and determined that there were no Jordanian casualties among those killed or wounded in the stampede.

At least 200 people were injured in the incident, which happened after more than 700,000 pilgrims, crowded at the site of the "stoning of the devil" ritual, began to press forward and

caused the stampede.

Mr. Salah said the last of the Jordanian pilgrims travelling by land will return Sunday evening.

Mr. Salah said Arab Israeli Muslims have already arrived in Amman by land and have been housed at a special pilgrim camp in the Jordan Valley. They will cross the King Hussein Bridge into Palestine on Sunday, he added.

Arab Israeli pilgrims travelling by air are due in Amman on Sunday, he said.

Jordanian-Tunisian committee to meet in Tunis this month

AMMAN (Petra) — The Joint Jordanian-Tunisian Higher Committee is due to meet in Tunis on April 21 under the chairmanship of the two countries' prime ministers, Abdul Salam Majali and Hamed Karoui, to review bilateral cooperation in various fields.

The higher committee meeting will be preceded by a preparatory committee meeting on April 19 grouping officials from the two sides. The delegations to this meeting

will be led by Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply Hani Mulla and his Tunisian counterpart.

The agendas of the coming meetings include ways to promote economic and trade exchanges, involvement of the private sector in launching joint ventures, prospects of concluding an executive programme to this effect, and attracting foreign investments to Tunisia and Jordan.

The committee is also set to

discuss means of stimulating the work of the Jordanian-Tunisian business council, participation in trade fairs organised by the two countries, and cooperation in agriculture.

The two sides are expected to implement the executive programmes of an agreement on tourism cooperation signed in 1995, one on cultural and scientific cooperation from 1997-1999, and another on higher education covering

1997-1999.

The two sides will discuss cooperation in the fields of media, health, pharmaceutical industries, youth and sports, social development, the judiciary and care for the handicapped.

They are also expected to discuss prospects of expanding cooperation in public administration and training personnel for public service in implementation of an agreement signed in 1994.

Jordanian-European programme launches quarterly newsletter

By Suha Ma'ayeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A joint Jordanian-European programme has launched its first project, a newsletter covering a series of workshops and training courses for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and voluntary societies helping the disabled.

The Jordanian-European

Information, Training and Technical Assistance for NGOs (IJETT), in cooperation with the Queen Alia Fund for Social Development (QAFSD), plans to publish the newsletter on a quarterly basis.

The training courses for the NGOs will be held at the Queen Zein Al Sharaf Complex to help establish cooperation among all NGOs work-

ing with the disabled to help improve their status and set up an information network to obtain all needed statistical data.

Previous workshops and projects, funded by the European Union (EU), have helped analyse the major problems of the disabled in Jordan "in order to implement necessary plans for developing and uplifting the

conditions of the disabled in all aspects," the newsletter said.

Around 600 Jordanian NGOs are working under the umbrella of the General Union of Voluntary Societies.

Their activities vary from social development and education to environment, youth, culture and health care to help for the disabled.

what's going on

FILM

* "Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie" at the French Cultural Centre, Jabal Weibdeh, on Monday, April 13, at 6:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Works by Maurice Haddad at Hammurabi Arts Gallery, Gardens Street (Tel. 5536098), until April 22.

* Exhibition of works by Jordanian artists Ramin Rshaid, Abdul-Jah Tbaibat and Qasem Al Dwairi at the Royal Cultural Centre, until April 16.

* Paintings on handmade paper at Noor Al Hussein Foundation, off Wadi Sagra St. (Tel. 5699141/2), until April 25.

Human rights groups ask government to allow media coverage of Shbeilat trial

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Two international human rights organisations have sent separate letters to the government protesting its decision to ban press coverage of the ongoing trial of opposition leader Leith Shbeilat.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Human Rights Watch said the ban violated internationally recognised norms dealing with freedom of expression and urged Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali to revoke the ban.

The trial of Mr. Shbeilat, a former member of Parliament and former president of the Jordanian Engineers Association, opened at the State Security Court on April 1 amid tight security.

The prosecutor has accused Mr. Shbeilat of inciting pro-Iraq riots in the southern town of Ma'an on Feb. 20, though initial charges of slandering His Majesty King Hussein have been dropped, his lawyers said.

Mr. Shbeilat was detained by police on his way back to Amman after delivering a

sermon at Ma'an's main mosque bours before the riots broke out. One Jordanian died and over 23 were injured in ensuing violence between police and demonstrators, forcing the government to impose a six-day ban on the desert town.

Mr. Shbeilat was blamed by the government for inciting the unrest.

The Press and Publications Department (PPD) sent letters to all Jordanian newspapers last month asking them not to publish any information relating to Mr. Shbeilat's case, a move that was condemned by his defence attorneys as well as journalists and editors.

The court also said any newspaper violating PPD orders will be subject to prosecution.

In its letter to Dr. Majali, the CPJ said the ban "was another disturbing infringement on the rights of journalists to report news and opinions freely" and violated the "most fundamental right of journalists to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers as guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights."

"The media blackout follows a disturbing pattern of government efforts to silence the press in Jordan," CPJ Chairman Gene Roberts was quoted as saying in the letter, a copy of which was sent to the Jordan Times.

"We urge the Jordanian government to end censorship and the criminal prosecution of journalists, which violate international press freedom standards."

Human Rights Watch, echoing CPJ views, said the ban on covering Mr. Shbeilat's court proceedings was not justified.

"Banning coverage of such a high-profile case, and prohibiting journalists from reporting news from the courtroom... can only be viewed as blatant state interference with the fundamental right of a free press to report the news, and the right of the public to obtain the news," wrote Hanan Magally, executive director of the Middle East division of the agency.

Human Rights Watch also criticised the ban on all public demonstrations that was enforced on Feb. 10 at the height of U.S.-Iraq tension

over access to Iraqi presidential sites by U.N. arms weapons inspectors.

It said the ban came "at a time when many Jordanians were deeply concerned about the prospect of a U.S.-led military strike on Iraq."

"The ban on peaceful demonstrations cannot be justified if its intent is to silence opposition voices and suppress freedom of expression."

The agency said it "was deeply concerned about the continuing pattern of restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression in Jordan" and urged the government to reverse "this

worrying trend."

The government has denied such charges, saying that it was acting within the boundaries of law and wanted to protect Jordan from possible acts of sabotage.

The two U.S. agencies expressed similar concern after the government introduced tough amendments to the Press and Publications Law in May 1997 while Parliament was in recess.

The High Court, in a surprise move, revoked the press restrictions earlier this year.

"We call on the Jordanian government to immediately rescind the ban on coverage of Leith Shbeilat's case and

Entrecanales S.A.-Jordan
conveys its deepest sympathy to
the Naddy Family
in their sorrow and grief.

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بفقيدهم المحامي الدكتور
حنان نده ونجله سهيل

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Yeltsin carrot-and-stick approach may break deadlock with Duma

MOSCOW (AFP) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin will have to offer parliament some carrots while brandishing the stick of early elections if he is to break the deadlock over his controversial nominee for prime minister, analysts said Saturday.

Mr. Yeltsin's protégé Sergei Kiriyenko, a 35-year-old technocrat, was defeated in the first round of voting Friday in the lower house state Duma, which rejected his candidacy by 186 votes to 143.

But the margin of defeat was narrower than expected, and Mr. Kiriyenko later said he was confident that "a consensus can be found," and that the Duma would not be dissolved.

If the Duma rejects the president's candidate three times the head of state is entitled to dissolve the chamber and call early elections.

Mr. Yeltsin signalled that he would not back down over Mr. Kiriyenko, immediately resubmitting his candidacy after Friday's vote.

Mr. Yeltsin has firmly rejected the Communists' demand for a coalition

government, but analysts said there was still room for concessions, such as minor posts in the new government for representatives of various Duma factions.

According to the constitution, after the president's candidate fails to pass the first vote, a second vote must be held in the Duma within a week.

The Kremlin looked set for some tough bargaining with deputies in the coming days to get Mr. Kiriyenko confirmed, but it was encouraged by evidence of splits in the opposition ranks which enabled him to garner more votes than expected.

"Yeltsin will wield the big stick in one hand, and a carrot in the other — votes may be secured by offering government posts, but not top posts. Some may even go to the Communists," said Dmitry Trenin, a political analyst at the Carnegie Endowment think-tank.

The Communists and their leftwing allies have 221 seats in the 450-seat chamber.

"The Duma does not want new elections now, so the president will maintain

the threat of dissolving the chamber," Mr. Trenin said.

Mr. Yeltsin, 67, made it clear in a radio address Friday that he was not prepared to let the political uncertainty hold up economic reforms for much longer.

Mr. Kiriyenko also stressed that the time had come for action rather than words, painting a grim picture of the economy.

Mr. Kiriyenko, a staunch market reformer and close ally of acting first deputy prime minister Boris Nemtsov, has been Mr. Yeltsin's protégé since the president sacked Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and his government on March 23.

Yevgeny Volk, an analyst at the Heritage Foundation in Moscow, said Mr. Yeltsin "can sacrifice some secondary positions to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's ultra-nationalists or to some other factions — they may get posts in the ministries of labour, education or health."

But Mr. Yeltsin's insistence on Mr. Kiriyenko "is a matter of principle now — he wants to emphasise his superior position in the

Russian political system," Mr. Volk said.

According to Mr. Trenin, Mr. Yeltsin "thinks Kiriyenko is the most convenient candidate. Kiriyenko will be fully under Yeltsin's control, without his own team or political base, and won't be able to compete with the president even a year from now."

Mr. Yeltsin's surprise dismissal of Mr. Chernomyrdin, who had served him loyally for five years, was triggered by a perception that the prime minister was usurping some of his powers, especially during his bouts of ill health, according to many analysts.

"For Yeltsin, the most important thing now is power, and he sacked Chernomyrdin because he saw him fulfilling many of the president's duties," Mr. Trenin said.

Despite Mr. Yeltsin's assurances that he will not seek a third term in the 2000 presidential elections, Kremlin officials have been vague on the issue, and a ruling is expected from the constitutional court later this year.



Drivers got stuck with their vehicles in Ettington, Warwickshire, Midlands, following heavy rain overnight which led to extensive flooding (AFP photo)

Britain lashed by worst storms in half a century

LONDON (R) — Rescuers searched for two people feared drowned Saturday after Britain's worst floods in half a century turned the Easter weekend into a washout.

Heavy downpours left a trail of destruction across the country, with hundreds of homes evacuated and millions of pounds worth of damage reported.

In central England, a 14-year-old boy washed out of a milkman's van in Warwickshire and a woman who fell off a boat near Northampton were both listed as missing.

Flood alerts were in force

for parts of the midlands as rivers swelled and some towns were virtually cut off in Britain's worst floods for more than 50 years.

Two people were killed after rain and even snow lashed Britain Friday, the start of the long holiday weekend. Car organisations reported traffic chaos.

At Stratford-upon-Avon, home to Shakespeare and one of the country's top tourist resorts, the river burst its banks and the popular theatre was flooded.

Friday night's performance, called aptly enough "The Merchant of Venice", had to be cancelled while

Saturday's matinee show — this time of "The Tempest" — was also called off as the elegant swans that glide across the Avon held sway over the watery town centre.

In Leamington Spa, cinema staff watched in disbelief as water lapped over the front row of seats following a holiday showing of the hit movie "Titanic".

"It is our very own Titanic. We wept when we saw it," cinema manager Gary Stevens told the Daily Telegraph.

Forecasters said more wet weather was on its way.

Latvia MPs ease rules for Russia minority

RIGA (R) — Latvian politicians, under the threat of Russian economic sanctions, have agreed new rules to allow the country's Russian-speakers to become citizens more easily, the Daina newspaper said Saturday.

Russia and Latvia have been at loggerheads in recent weeks, with Moscow accusing Riga of discriminating against its 700,000 Russian-speakers by applying tough rules on naturalisation.

The row intensified last week with Latvia threatening to divert its oil shipments from its small neighbour.

Daina quoted member of parliament Andris Ameriks as saying that a working group of the top ruling parties had found a compromise to allow easier naturalisation of Russian speakers.

The newspaper quoted Mr. Ameriks as saying new rules would allow children who had reached the age of 16 to become citizens automatically if they could prove a "knowledge" of Latvian.

Children who were educated at schools where Latvian was the main language would not have to take a language test.

The new rules would also end a system which allows people to apply for naturalisation in a series of age groups, with the youngest first and oldest last.

This would open up the field to all without citizenship who were born in Latvia and Mr. Ameriks was quoted as saying that this was 47 per cent of all non-citizens.

The minorities row has rumbled on since the collapse of the former Soviet

Union in 1991 but became more serious last week with Russia tightening the economic screw with the oil threat.

Such a move would hurt the key Latvian oil transit sector, a major source of revenue.

Mr. Ameriks told Daina the proposals to ease the naturalisation rules would have to be finally approved by a meeting of government parties next week.

Latvia's naturalisation system has proved a marked failure, with very few Russian-speakers coming forward. However, most Western bodies dismiss allegations of outright discrimination.

The European Union (EU) has urged faster integration of the Russian minority for Latvia to qualify for eventual EU membership.

Cambodia's King Sihanouk returns home from seclusion in China

SIEM REAP, Cambodia (AFP) — Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk returned home Saturday to end more than three months of seclusion in China, as his troubled country nears critical political and military crossroads.

A Royal Air Cambodge flight carrying the ageing monarch from Beijing touched down in this historic northern Cambodian town — home of the famed 12th-century Angkor Wat temple complex — a few minutes before sunset.

King Sihanouk, on his first trip home since pardoning his son Prince Norodom Ranariddh and setting in motion a Japanese-brokered peace plan for the fractured nation, was met by senior government officials.

Dressed in a dark suit, King Sihanouk waved to a small cluster of supporters gathered at the airport before descending on the tarmac where he was welcomed by the national assembly president, and acting head of state, Chea Sim.

Although not met by second Prime Minister Hun Sen, who ousted his son as co-premier some nine months ago, he was greeted by First Prime Minister Ung Huot.

The 75-year-old monarch's return home comes as Cambodia approaches scheduled elections in July, and government forces claim fresh victories in fighting Khmer Rouge guerrillas.

King Sihanouk, along with many observers, has been pessimistic about the July 26 polls meeting standards set by the international community, without which the vote is not likely to be supported or recognised.

The international community is demanding that Prince Ranariddh, whose royalist FUNCINPEC party won historic United Nations-brokered polls in 1993, be allowed to participate in elections if they are to be considered free and fair.

Some steps, including the king's granting of a pardon with government approval to the prince, thereby erasing two criminal convictions levelled by the government, have already been taken.

But many analysts here and abroad have warned that much more still needs to be done for the election to be credible.

Prince Ranariddh, who is now in Thailand after returning to Cambodia for a brief four-day respite from exile at the beginning of the month, is expected to travel here in the next two weeks to discuss the situation with his father.

Karadzic will never surrender, wife declares

BELGRADE (AFP) — The wife of Radovan Karadzic, Bosnia's most-wanted war crimes suspect, said Saturday he would never surrender for trial.

"Rumours that Radovan Karadzic ... is ready to turn himself in to the Hague tribunal are false," Ljiljana Zelenc-Karadzic told the Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA, monitored in Belgrade.

"He will never turn him-

self in voluntarily, and he will resist any eventual attempt to arrest him, capture him or illegally detain him," she said.

It was the most direct statement yet from Mr. Karadzic's inner circle that he has no intention of surrendering to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), which is based in The Hague.

Western sources had said earlier this week that

Mr. Karadzic had vacated his power base of Pale, near Sarajevo, and hired two U.S. lawyers with a view to possibly going to The Hague "spontaneously."

Mr. Karadzic, a hardline nationalist who led the Bosnian Serbs during the 1992-95 war, is wanted by the ICTY together with his army commander General Ratko Mladic for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Witness claims suggest paparazzi not to blame for Diana crash

PARIS (AFP) — Evidence from a motorcyclist claiming to have been first on the scene of the car crash in which Diana, Princess of Wales, was killed last Aug. 31, appears to clear the paparazzi of blame, a French newspaper report said Saturday.

Eric Petel, 25, told magistrate Hervé Stephan on Feb. 2 that he was "first to arrive" at the crash scene, before the press photographers who were subsequently charged in connection with the accident.

Mr. Petel said he had raised the alarm and alerted the police but that the police refused to believe him. In

February, investigators expressed "deep reservations" about Mr. Petel's evidence.

However, according to La Voix du Nord newspaper Saturday, Mr. Petel's lawyer Antoine Deguignes "once again explained" the facts to Mr. Stephan who "recently received confirmation of the statement" made by Mr. Petel whose evidence was not judged to be "plausible".

"He did call the 17 (the telephone number for French police) he did go to the Avenue Mozart police station before being taken to the Quai des Orfèvres (central police headquarters),

and thus, all the initial theories come tumbling down," the northern French regional paper said.

The paper said Mr. Petel was a "witness whom higher diplomatic interests attempted to sideline because his version of what happened suited nobody".

According to Mr. Petel, he was overtaken by the princess's Mercedes on Aug. 31, while travelling on his motorbike at a speed of "between 120 and 130 kilometres an hour" along the expressway beside the river Seine in Paris.

When the accident happened "a second later" in the underpass, Mr. Petel

was "alone. No paparazzi, no Fiat Uno, no witness" and 30 seconds later, "he belted the dying (Diana) in his arms and was still alone", before setting off to seek help, the Voix du Nord report said.

Investigators have suggested that the Mercedes hit a mysterious Fiat Uno car before ramming into a pillar of the underpass.

Princess Diana died shortly after the crash. Her Egyptian-born companion Dodi Fayed was killed outright as was the driver Henri Paul. Only bodyguard Trevor Rees-Jones survived the crash, but was badly injured.

Neighbours warn against Kosovo sanctions

SANTORINI, Greece (R) — Greece, Bulgaria and Romania said Saturday that any sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia over the Kosovo crisis must not be allowed to damage the economies of neighbouring countries.

The foreign ministers of the three Balkan countries said after two days of talks on the Greek holiday island of Santorini that regional concerns must be taken into consideration by the international community if it acts against Belgrade.

"Any measures against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia should take into account the political and economic stability of southeastern Europe and should not harm the interests of the states of the region," the ministers said.

At least 80 people were killed last month in Serbian police assaults on suspected strongholds of

ethnic Albanian separatists in Kosovo, which is a region of Serbia in rump Yugoslavia.

The big power Contact Group for Yugoslavia has given Belgrade until April 25 to reach a settlement with the ethnic Albanians or face renewed economic sanctions.

While countries in the region such as Bulgaria, Romania and Greece are concerned that violence may spill over the borders, they are also wary of the effect on their economies of trade sanctions.

"The losses which Bulgaria had during Bosnia-Herzegovina (sanctions) have been more than the servicing of the government debt for three years," Bulgarian Foreign Minister Nadezhda Mihailova told Reuters.

"The sanctions were more harmful for the neighbouring states (than

those they were aimed at)," she said.

Many regional experts believe that while sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia for its role in the Bosnia conflict hurt the country's citizens, they also allowed crime to thrive across the region.

All three ministers said that recent multilateral links among Balkan countries had given them more of a voice in international policy concerning the region.

"Cooperation... allows us to be involved in affairs that concern us," Greek Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos said.

Greece, the only European Union nation in the Balkans, has been pushing hard to take a leading role in the region — hosting a summit of Balkan leaders in Crete last year and encouraging a number of multilateral ministerial meetings.

Foreign ministers from

the region are to meet in Istanbul in June and a second Balkan summit is to take place in Antalya, Turkey, later this year.

Mr. Pangalos said Friday that Greece would participate in talks with Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on creating a Balkan peacekeeping force.

The force would be used only for peacekeeping, not intervention, and would work under the auspices of NATO's partnership for peace programme, which links the alliance to former Communist countries.

NATO members Greece and Turkey have both claimed the idea of such a force as their own. Greece did not attend a meeting in March on the issue that was held in Ankara.

Croatia to request extradition of camp commander

ZAGREB (AFP) — Croatia will ask Argentina to extradite former World War II concentration camp commander Dinko Sakic, after Buenos Aires issued an arrest warrant this week, the Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granic has said.

"Croatia is going to ask for the extradition of Dinko Sakic. Croatia is a lawful state which can bravely face up to the (period of) the NDH and Jasenovac, and assure a fair trial," Foreign Minister Mate Granic told the Slobodna Dalmacija daily.

The NDH was Croatia's short-lived fascist state allied to the German Nazis during World War II which oversaw the detention and murder of tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews, gypsies and others in concentration camps such as the one at Jasenovac, 90 kilometres southeast of Zagreb.

Mr. Sakic, 76, has continued to elude a detention order issued Tuesday after he admitted on Argentine television Monday that he headed the Jasenovac camp in the former Yugoslavia.

Despite his admission, Mr. Sakic, who obtained Argentine nationality and lived quietly in Argentina for 51 years, denied that any killings occurred at the Jasenovac camp under his watch.

But the Simon Wiesenthal centre in Jerusalem said this week that Mr. Sakic was a murderous leader, responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jews, gypsies, Serbs, and foes of the pro-Nazi government then ruling Croatia.

The ex-captain told the television programme that he considered himself "a Croatian patriot." Mr. Sakic's wife said he travelled to Buenos Aires late Tuesday to ask for help from the Croatian embassy, which denied having had any contact with the ex-soldier.

Argentine President Carlos Menem said Thursday, before Croatia said it would demand Mr. Sakic's extradition, that he could be sent to Israel.

"He may be sought by that country because his victims were Jews," Mr. Menem said of Mr. Sakic.

Mr. Menem also indicated Croatian authorities could request Mr. Sakic's extradition.

Justice Minister Raul Granillo Ocampo said Wednesday that "if some country asks for his extradition, I don't think it will be denied."

A book put on sale in Zagreb this week recalls the horrors prisoners faced at the camp.

Marked now by a monumental concrete rose clearly visible from the nearby road, the transit, labour and death camps at Jasenovac, southeast of Zagreb, were founded in 1941.

Serbs, Jews, gypsies, Muslims and Croat oppositionists were among those imprisoned there and estimates as to the numbers killed vary widely. The Simon Wiesenthal institute says 800,000 perished although Jewish sources here say the total figure could be between 80,000 to 90,000 with the largest group being Serbs.

Entitled "Zna li se?" (Do we know?), the book, including gruesome pictures of corpses from the camp, was produced by the Jewish community in Zagreb to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of the 1939-45 war.

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Challenged Paris mayor insists he will not resign

PARIS (AFP) — Corruption-tainted Paris mayor Jean Tiberi said Saturday that he would resist efforts by dissident right-wingers and the socialists to unseat him from his position.

"Under no circumstances will I resign," Mr. Tiberi told the Europe Un radio station, adding that he didn't envisage early elections to resolve the current crisis.

Right-wingers who con-

trol the Paris assembly are locked in a succession battle after Mr. Tiberi was challenged for the leadership by former Minister Jacques Toubon.

He launched a "palace coup" against Mr. Tiberi Monday by drawing a third of his supporters into a new conservative group, PARIS, an acronym for Paris, Audacity, Renewal, Initiative, Solidarity.

"I was elected mayor of Paris and I will remain the

mayor of Paris until 2001," Mr. Tiberi said defiantly, referring to the year his mandate is due to end.

"I will never accept that Jacques Toubon will be mayor of Paris," he said after again denouncing what he called Toubon's "putsch" against him.

As the right-wingers indulge in internecine warfare, the socialists in the city assembly have taken advantage of the

split to demand Mr. Tiberi's resignation.

Despite the splits and defections to either camp among right-wingers, neither of the two now has a working majority, leaving the socialists as the biggest group on the town council but without a commanding lead.

Mr. Tiberi is proposing new talks for a "reconciliation" after Easter. In the meantime, business has ground to a halt.

Hindu nationalists call for debate on shelved radical policies

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A Hindu nationalist party called for a debate on shelved radical policies which were seen as a cobble together of a coalition government.

Mr. Advani, the party president, said the government should not be seen as a coalition of the Hindu People's Party and the right wing, non-constitutional, and non-democratic.

The nationalist coalition government, backed by regional parties, had been in power for a month with a Hindu majority.

The BJP plans to include a temple on the site of the destroyed Hindu temples of Ayodhya, a move which has sparked two wars between India and Pakistan in the past 50 years.

The Ayodhya issue will be taken out of both national and the legislative spheres and confined to exploring a peaceful solution through dialogue.

Mr. Advani said the radical politics was left out in the coalition government's agenda as they had made "nationalism a governance difficulty."

Large areas of governance have little to do with party, except the over-riding principle of national unity.

He said good governance is not spheres of social life becomes possible when it is decided and depoliticised.

Mr. Advani told a group here of the BJP's philosophy of "one nation, one people, one culture, one language, one religion, one faith, one God, one destiny."

He said the BJP emerged as the largest bloc in parliament during the February elections with 170 seats, but analysts predicted it would not last more than 18 months.

Former Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach, the former foreign minister of the country, died at the age of 75, a Vietnamese source said.

Thach, who had recently been promoted to the rank of general, died of a heart complication, the source said.

Thach, who was born on May 15, 1923, was a strong and urban diplomat during Vietnam's foreign relations after the invasion of Cambodia in 1979.

He was thoughtful but he

Hindu nationalists call for debate on shelved radical policies

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A top Hindu nationalist leader Saturday called for a "constructive debate" on his rightwing party's most radical policies which were frozen to cobble together a coalition government.

Lal Krishna Advani, home minister and the outgoing president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), said "the right approach is to continue peaceful, non-confrontational and constructive debate and dialogue on them."

The nationalist-led coalition government, backed by 16 regional partners, scraped through a confidence vote last month with a wafer-thin majority.

The BJP plans included building a temple on the site of a mosque destroyed by Hindu fanatics at Ayodhya six years ago and the drafting of uniform civil laws concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance.

These were bitterly opposed by Muslims, who make up 125 million of India's population of 960 million.

The nationalists had also called for the Muslim-majority state of Kashmir to be more closely integrated into India. The territory has sparked two wars between India and Pakistan during the past 50 years.

"The Ayodhya issue should be taken out of both the judicial and the legislative spheres and confined only to exploring a peaceful solution through concerted dialogue," Mr. Advani said.

He said the radical policies were left out in the coalition government's national agenda as they would have made "coalition governance difficult."

"Large areas of governance have little to do with ideology, except the overriding principle of national interests."

"Indeed, good governance in most spheres of national life becomes possible only when it is deideologised and depoliticised," Mr. Advani told a meeting here of the BJP's senior members.

The BJP, which champions a philosophy of "one nation, one people, one culture", is accused of planning to replace the secular constitution with a Hindu theocracy.

Mr. Advani said there was a need for a "new BJP" to "shoulder the responsibilities of the new era that is opening up for both India and our own party."

"The new BJP will be guided not by the issues of yesterday but by the agenda of tomorrow."

The BJP emerged as the largest bloc in parliament following the February-March elections with 179 seats but analysts predict the coalition government led by it would not last more than 18 months.



Police outside Seoul's Myongdong Cathedral check the ID of students after 10 radical members of the outlawed Hanchongnyon (Federation of Student Councils) launched a hunger strike to back demands that the organisation be allowed to stage a three-day rally and elect new office bearers (AFP photo)

S. Korean police and students in standoff after arrests

SEOUL (AFP) — Thousands of riot police, heavily outnumbered by radical students at two universities in southern Taegu city, threatened to storm the campuses Saturday if an election was held for officers of the outlawed student federation, reports and student sources said.

Some 8,000 riot police faced off against around 300 students holed up inside Yeungnam University and other 1,000 in the city's Kyongbuk campus.

Students, speaking by phone, said some 200 of the Kyongbuk students had tried to push their way by hand-to-hand fighting through the police cordon off campus mid-afternoon, but failed.

There was conspicuous restraint on both sides, reports said, with the radical students forsaking their trademark firebombs and rocks, and no sign of tear gas on the part of police.

The stand-off followed the arrest overnight of six students and the brief detention of 87 others who had pelted the police with stones, Yonhap

News Agency said. The radicals, members of the outlawed Hanchongnyon (Federation of University Councils), branded pro-North Korea by Seoul, called on the police to allow them to "peacefully" hold an on-campus election of new office bearers.

But the police said they would storm the campus if the election went ahead.

In Seoul meanwhile 10 Hanchongnyon members launched a hunger strike in the grounds of the city's Myongdong Cathedral. The 10 vowed not to eat until Wednesday, the deadline the students are asking to hold their elections.

The federation is branded "pro-North Korean" by Seoul because it defines the South Korean government as "the puppet government of the U.S. imperialists."

Police had drawn up the massive cordon around the campus, railway stations and bus terminals to prevent the planned three-day rally and elections from Friday through Sunday.

The impasse coincided with the opening of crucial talks between the two warring Koreas in Beijing Saturday afternoon to discuss fertiliser aid and other issues.

The talks are the first direct inter-Korean government dialogue since contacts were scuttled four years ago by the sudden death of former North Korean President Kim Il-Sung.

Through its official broadcasts, Pyongyang has praised Hanchongnyon as true patriots, supporting efforts by its members to rebuild their battered organisation.

In the past two years, scores of radical leaders have been hunted down and arrested. The government claimed that 191 out of 206 universities had kicked the group off their campuses.

The continuation of the crackdown by Kim Dae-Jung, a former dissident who took office in February, was anticipated when jailed Hanchongnyon members were excluded from a recent amnesty for political prisoners.

No pressure to resolve Indonesians' claim for asylum

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — The Malaysian government has not brought pressure to bear on the United States to find a quick solution to the issue of eight Indonesians who stormed their embassy to seek refugee status, an official said Saturday.

"There is no pressure from the Malaysian government to resolve it. We don't want to resolve the issue quickly," a U.S. embassy spokesman told AFP.

He said U.S. Ambassador John Malot had met senior Malaysian foreign ministry officials early Saturday to discuss the matter.

"There is no deadline set to end the issue," he added. A group of 35 Indonesians broke into the U.S. embassy and three other diplomatic compounds in a desperate bid for political asylum.

Most of the frail, poorly-dressed immigrants from Indonesia's troubled Aceh province put up no resistance when all but eight were swiftly rounded up and handed over to Malaysian security forces.

The immigrants who entered the French, Swiss and Brunei's Sharif Ali Palace were denied

asylum and police were called in to evict them. Only those in the U.S. embassy were allowed to stay.

The U.S. official also said that they have highlighted to the Malaysian government the need to allow the U.N. agency on refugees to visit the detention camps to ascertain those who are seeking refugee status.

"We pointed it out to the Malaysian side in a friendly way," he said.

The U.S. official said it was a standard practice for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to conduct interviews of the Indonesians who seek protection.

"We are in touch with the UNHCR. They are cooperative. There is consultation (about the eight). Certainly, there is no indication of them stepping back and washing their hands" of the problem, he said.

Fourteen illegal Indonesians have also been holed up at the UNHCR office since March 30, when they crashed a truck through the compound gates. Their requests for asylum are being looked into.

U.N. refugee officials who

have voiced concern about illegal Indonesian migrants to be deported, Friday said it was up to the United States to decide the fate of the illegals who stormed the embassy to seek asylum.

Malaysia, which has deported thousands of illegal immigrants has been criticised by human rights groups for not discriminating between economic and political migrants.

The spokesman also said the embassy was not ready to turn over the illegals to the police or the Malaysian government. "This is a serious issue."

The UNHCR official had said the Indonesians argued they are involved in political activities in Aceh and could be in danger if they return home.

Indonesian military officials have denied that Aceh immigrants face reprisals if they return to their home province, where a separatist insurgency has rumbled on since the mid-1970s.

But Indonesian sources and officials said the military was detaining hundreds of repatriated illegal immigrants for questioning over possible links to the outlawed Aceh Merdeka (Free Aceh) group.

Seoul dangles aid to Pyongyang, but at a price

BEIJING (R) — The first high-level talks between rival North and South Korea in four years started Saturday with Seoul demanding concessions on the emotional issue of family reunions as the price for help to famine-stricken Pyongyang.

Pyongyang called for the talks to discuss fertiliser shipments desperately needed during spring crop planting.

South Korea's chief delegate offered to go much further, dangling the prospect of a broad package of aid and investment to rescue millions of North Koreans from starvation and revive Pyongyang's crippled economy.

But he made clear that assistance would depend on steps by the North towards peace and reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula, divided since the 1950-53 Korean war.

In particular, the South was seeking progress on reuniting millions of Koreans separated from their relatives by an armed truce that ended the conflict.

The North's delegation turned up one hour late for the talks in a plush Beijing hotel, the first high-level bilateral contact since the death of North Korean "great leader" Kim Il-Sung in 1994.

Delegates emerged after two hours and Seoul's leading negotiator, the vice minister for national unification, said the two sides agreed to meet again Sunday.

"The talks went ahead in an open-minded manner and it is very significant to have met after three years and nine months," Jeong Se-Hyun said.

The North Korean delegation, led by Jon Kim-Chol, also a vice minister, made no comment to the media.

Mr. Jeong declined to give details of the North's negotiating position.

But a South Korean official said earlier that the North had agreed to go beyond discussions on fertiliser aid and talk about family reunions.

"Both sides agreed that the issue of reuniting separated families should be a key item on which to seek a breakthrough," the South Korean official told reporters.

North Korea's farmland is exhausted by a combination of disastrous agricultural policies and three consecutive years of floods and drought.

The country is surviving largely on international food handouts. South Korea is the North's best hope for large-scale aid and investment.

Mr. Jeong said he made clear the South Korean public would not agree to help the North while their own economy was in trouble unless Pyongyang offered political concessions.

"In regards to the fertiliser request, I reminded the North Koreans that even South Korea and the government are facing many

difficulties because of the economic crisis," he said. "Considering the size of the North Korean request, one of the most important things is to get the approval of the South Korean people," he said.

"We expect reciprocity from the North Korean side."

A statement read by Mr. Jeong during the talks, and made available in English, promised fertiliser, further food aid and supplies of seeds, pesticides and equipment "for a fundamental solution to your food shortage problem."

It said Seoul would honour its promise to help finance light-water nuclear reactors for the North. And it offered "large-scale investments in your territory."

In return, South Korea expected efforts towards reunifying the divided country.

"The separated family problem caused by our division is an urgent issue and the solution cannot be delayed any longer. Old family members are passing away one after another, leaving their half-century-old grief unrelieved," the statement said.

It proposed a family meeting and mail exchange centre in the border truce village of Panmunjom and permission by North Korea for hometown visits from the South.

Seoul also called for an exchange of envoys and the reopening of liaison offices in Panmunjom that were abandoned by the North in 1996.

The previous high-level meeting between the two Koreas discussed arrangements for a presidential summit, but the death of Kim Il-Sung ended the initiative and relations later plunged.

'Cannibalism, food theft in N. Korea'

BEIJING (AFP) — Incidents of cannibalism are being reported from famine-stricken North Korea as those struggling to survive were denied international food aid, aid agency Medicins Sans Frontières (MSF) said Saturday.

Much international aid was going to officials and the army, it said, quoting witnesses and other sources in a report on the North Korean situation.

Marcel Roux, China chief for MSF, said the group interviewed people on the Chinese side of the border with North Korea, who said almost nothing was reaching those dying of disease and starvation.

Mr. Roux said sources for the report included North Korean refugees, the most recent of whom fled the country in December, the Korean minority living on the Chinese side of the border who had set up networks to help families left behind, and ethnic Chinese who had been to North Korea on business or had spoken to contacts there.

An unidentified 23-year-old from Buk Cheng village was quoted in the MSF report as saying: "Our neighbours ate their own daughter in order not to die of hunger. It is true, I saw it with my own eyes."

An 18-year-old orphan said: "Our cousin killed, salted and ate an orphan whom no one cared about."

A Chinese Korean from Zhongjiang said that in one village a woman ate her two-year-old son so she would not die of starvation.

Most North Koreans interviewed said the

state stopped issuing food rations three years ago, and in some areas rations stopped five years ago.

A teacher in the Chinese border town of Tumen was quoted as saying international aid agencies were being deceived by the North Korean government.

"My cousin said a year ago grain was distributed, but they were ordered not to touch it," the teacher said.

"Foreigners came to check that the grain had been distributed to the population. After the foreigners had left the government collected the sacks and never mentioned the aid again."

The MSF report said refugees spoke of bodies lying on roadsides, people dying in railway stations and army trucks being driven around at night to collect corpses.

A man from Hyesan, who said his five-year-old son had died of starvation, said his family had received one kilogramme of rice last June.

"Most of the aid goes to army and government cadres but never to the people," he said.

A report released earlier this month by the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations estimated that at least one million North Koreans died of hunger from 1996-97.

The North said last month its food-grain coffers were empty, and the U.N. World Food Programme has appealed for 657,972 tonnes of food aid to assist 7.47 million North Koreans, almost a third of the total population.

U.S. protecting doctor who killed drug lord

WASHINGTON (AFP) — A Mexican doctor who participated in a plastic surgery operation that accidentally killed the head of the Ciudad Juarez drug cartel in 1997 is living in the United States under government protection, the Washington Post reported Saturday.

Pedro Rincon was one of five doctors who attempted to carry out major plastic surgery on drug lord Amado Carrillo Fuentes, at the time the most powerful and feared drug smuggler in Mexico.

The operation went wrong and Carrillo Fuentes died on the operating table on July 3, 1997.

Weeks later, the bodies of two of the five doctors who participated in the operation were found tortured and stuffed into concrete-filled steel barrels. Fearing he would also be tortured and killed, Dr. Rincon went to the Mexican police.

"The Mexican government, not wanting more controversy, offered to turn him over to U.S. intelligence officials, the offer was accepted, and Pedro Rincon and his family were clandestinely taken to the United States last November aboard a U.S. government jet," the Post reported.

U.S. officials, in part based on Dr. Rincon's statements, say that Carrillo died due to "medical failures". Mexican officials however say that Carrillo Fuentes' death was part of a plot by rival drug gangs, or by rivals within his organisation.

Thai resort town sets up centre to fight foreign mafia

BANGKOK (AFP) — Officials in Thailand's coastal resort city of Pattaya will set up a police centre to combat the growing activities of foreign organised crime syndicates, a report said Saturday.

Pattaya officials said the centre would coordinate all concerned agencies in the fight against mafia-style groups believed to be operating there, the Nation daily reported.

City mayor Paiton Subthammongkorn said the city was willing to open its coffers to support the centre, but was opposed the deployment of police commandos, which he felt would ruin the resort area's tourist charm.

The move follows the speedy trial and conviction Thursday of a young Russian gunman for the

murder of a Pattaya bar owner. A court in Chon Buri province sentenced 29-year-old Harro Kerz, an Estonian, to life imprisonment.

The case aroused police fears that Russian organised crime gangs are gaining a foothold in the city, famed for its commercial sex industry.

Mr. Kerz was arrested last Saturday at Bangkok's international airport. He was convicted of killing Russian pub owner Konstantin Povoloski on March 31 in Pattaya, 150 kilometres southeast of the capital.

The Nation daily Thursday reported Thai police were tracing links between the gang-style slaying and Russian crime syndicates believed to be operating in Thailand.

An earlier report in the

Bangkok Post quoted police as saying another Russian man, who wanted lists in many countries, was suspected of masterminding the murder, but had fled the country. Investigators have said the murder was likely just the tip of the iceberg of Russian mafia activity, thought to include rackets such as extortion, executions, drugs and prostitution.

Police said the gang-style execution of the Pattaya pub owner followed similar reports that Russian gangs were demanding protection money from Russian nationals with businesses in the tourist city. More Russians visit Pattaya than any other foreign nationality, with more than 20,000 arriving so far this year, the report added.

George Michael says he's gay

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — British pop icon George Michael came out and openly stated that he was gay in an exclusive interview on CNN that aired late Friday.

The interview follows the singer's arrest here for "engaging in a lewd act" in a Beverly Hills park late Tuesday. This is the first time that Michael, 34, talked to reporters about the incident.

"I want to say that I have no problem with people knowing that I'm in a relationship with a man right now," George Michael told Cable News Network. "I have not been in a relationship with a woman for almost 10 years."

Michael said he was ready to acknowledge that he was gay "because I've already kind of

done that — haven't I? I've done that in a way I didn't really intend to."

The 34-year-old singer was alone when an undercover officer allegedly saw him commit an unspecified act and arrested him, Beverly Hills police said.

Police refused to specify the nature of the act, declining to confirm whether Michael had exposed himself or was masturbating when he was arrested at the park that is reputedly a gay cruising area.

Michael posted \$500 in bail and was released late Tuesday. He is scheduled to appear in Beverly Hills Municipal Court on May 5 for his arraignment.

Michael admitted that he put himself "in an extremely stupid and vulnerable position."

"I don't feel any shame. I feel

stupid and I feel reckless and weak for having allowed my sexuality to be exposed this way," he told CNN.

Michael also admitted that he had committed similar "reckless" acts in the past.

The singer apologised to his fans for the incident, and reassured them that all was well. "I just want to let them know that I'm okay," he said.

Michael also told his fans that his early love songs were written about women, but that his more recent ones were about men.

The pop star is famous for such hits as "I Want Your Sex" and "Faith" and was one of Princess Diana's favourite singers. He attended her funeral in September and was one of three producers of a tribute to her.

Former Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach dies

HANOI (AFP) — Nguyen Co Thach, the former Vietnamese foreign minister and master diplomat who died at the age of 75, a Vietnamese diplomatic source said Saturday.

Thach, who had recently suffered heart problems, died Friday in Hanoi Military Hospital from cardiac complications, the source said.

Thach, who was born on March 15, 1923, was a strong-willed and urbane diplomat who ran Vietnam's foreign policy during Hanoi's years in the wilderness after the invasion of Cambodia in 1979.

"He was thoughtful but he

knew where the lines were drawn in what he wanted to communicate," said one Western diplomat who observed Thach last July during a three-day conference orchestrated by former U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara.

Thach was a member of the all-powerful Communist Party politburo until 1991, when he was ousted from the government and stripped of his party posts — apparently to appease China.

Despite his sacrificial ouster, Thach maintained close ties with the Vietnamese elite, and had close links to

senior officials from many countries abroad.

Le Dong Sonh, a senior Vietnamese economist and close friend of Thach's, told AFP that Thach was "highly respected as a politician with a vision and a very skillful diplomat."

"He has got a lot of friends all over the world," he added. Before joining the foreign service in 1954, Thach served as a colonel and assistant to General Vo Nguyen Giap, the mastermind of the victory at Dien Bien Phu that ended French rule in Vietnam.

He was appointed consul general in New Delhi in 1956

and spent his years there polishing his suave manners and mastery of languages that set him aside from the dull apparition in the foreign ministry.

In 1968 he was appointed vice foreign minister and came to the world's attention when along with his mentor Le Duc Tho and former Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy, he took part in secret negotiations ending U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war.

Thach is survived by his wife Pham Thi Phuc, who formerly worked for UNESCO. His funeral is to be held in Hanoi on April 16.

— *Middle East International*

Features

Arabs on the Titanic: Sharing the pain but not the glory

By Ray Hanania

WITH JUST two words, "Yalla Habibi," audiences around the world received their first hint that aboard the ill-fated voyage of the Titanic were passengers of Arab heritage.

Although the brief words survived the editor's cut, the three and one-half hour blockbuster movie skipped past the tragedy of its Arab passengers, whom witnesses said had the liveliest parties and celebrated four on-board weddings.

All told, there were only 706 survivors of the 2,223 passengers and crew who sailed on the maiden voyage of the Titanic. There were 74 passengers whose names were obviously of Arab heritage.

(Although one Arab survivor and several other sources contend there were more than 165 Arabs on board, I searched and reviewed every name on the passenger and crew and business concessionaire list and only could identify 74 names that were obviously of Arab heritage.)

All the Arab passengers were ticketed "Third Class," except four who travelled "Second Class," — distinctions that related to accommodations and the price of the boarding pass. Only 33 Arabs survived, rescued by the Carpathia, living to share their personal tales of horror, having witnessed entire families drown as the ship slowly sank into the deep, dark seas of the Atlantic Ocean.

Like many events in history, Arabs experience the pain, but receive little glory.

Director John Cameron drew on the ethnicity of other passengers in making the 11 Academy Award-winning film including a lively Irish "haffi" and featuring characters of Swedish, Italian, Irish and English heritage.

It's not easy to read through the lengthy list of passengers, let alone decipher who was or was not of Arab heritage. We can only guess in some instances, and my instinct tells me the number, 74, is slightly low.

Titanic sailed from Southampton, England on April 10, 1912. The largest ship ever built, it made stops at Cherbourg, France, where some of the Arab passengers boarded, and Queenstown, Ireland, before heading out to the high seas for its intended destination, New York City.

There were not enough life boats to carry all the passengers to safety. Those in the Third Class galleys, in the lower decks, found themselves cast aside by a frantic ship's crew desperate to escort the First Class passengers to safety.

The barriers that divided the Third Class passengers from the rest of the ship were broken only after the passengers realised that the ship was sinking.

Two hours and forty minutes after the Titanic struck the iceberg, the ship disappeared into the sea. Most of those who died, including 42 Arab passengers, died, from hypothermia in the arctic-like cold waters, not because they drowned. Among the survivors was the ship's parent company representative, Joseph Bruce Ismay, who survived to testify before lengthy U.S. Senate hearings several days later in New York. His cowardice, taking a seat on a lifeboat before other passengers, was well documented.

Not told at these hearings were the remorseful tales of tragedy that accompanied the Arab passengers, some of whom departed on the voyage with visions of new futures in new worlds. We know of their stories thanks in large part to people like Philip Hind and Michael A. Findlay, who wrote an informative memorial to the Titanic on the World Wide Web.

Here are some of the brief stories and profiles, followed by a complete list of the Arab passengers who survived and who perished on April 14, 1912.

Banoura Ayoub (Listed often as Ayout Banouray): In her early teens, Ayoub was travelling from Lebanon to Detroit, Michigan where she was to be re-united with her family. She travelled with her cousins, Shawnee George Wahbee, Thomas Tannous, Gerious Yousseff and Tannous Dobarr, who were to continue through Detroit to Youngstown, Ohio, where today a large Arab American community flourishes.

Shawnee (profiled below) and Ayoub survived. All three men, travelling to find jobs at the steel mills in Youngstown, died. Banoura Ayoub eventually moved to Windsor, Ontario, Canada, another centre of Arab growth.

Thomas Tannous is reportedly related to the family of Danny Thomas (Jacobs).

Mrs. George Joseph Wahbee, known as Shawnee Abi Saab.

The better known of the Arabs who travelled on the Titanic was born in Thoun, Lebanon on Palm Sunday, 1874. (In Arabic, the name Shawnee means Palm Sunday). She was the youngest of seven children, the daughter of Thomas George Abi-Sab and Katoole Deeb Abi-Saab. She married George Joseph Wahbee and came to America in 1906, hoping to make enough money to return to Lebanon and buy land for her family. But, when her husband died in 1908, she remained in Youngstown, Ohio, where she raised her children, Joseph, Thomas, Albert, Rose and Mary, who had stayed behind in Lebanon.

Why does the Titanic so fascinate us? It's a story about the hour of our death

By Robert Fisk

THE TITANIC sank on my father's thirteenth birthday. He always remembered the day, not just because his Birkenhead home was across the Mersey from the head office of the White Star Line but because the Fisks were seafarers. My grandfather Edward was an officer on the Cutty Sark: a 19th-century snapshot of the tea clipper's crew in Sydney — now in the museum aboard the restored sailing ship at Greenwich — contains a face that looks startlingly similar to my own.

Four decades later, my mum and dad took me to see A Night to Remember at the old Maidstone Granada cinema. I still recall how my mother reached for her handkerchief as Kenneth More — playing an avuncular Second Officer Lightholler — gently took a sleeping child from the arms of his doomed father and put the little boy in the lifeboat.

Three years ago, I was talking to the daughter of a Titanic victim in the tiny Lebanese Christian village of Kfar Mishki; 123 Lebanese went down on the Titanic but their families received no compensation from the White Star Line — they had boarded as wait-listed passengers at Cherbourg and their names were thus never entered on the official passenger list. Their fate is represented in James Cameron's new film by a demeaning three-second scene of a man in Turkish clothes trying to translate a list of the liner's emergency instructions.

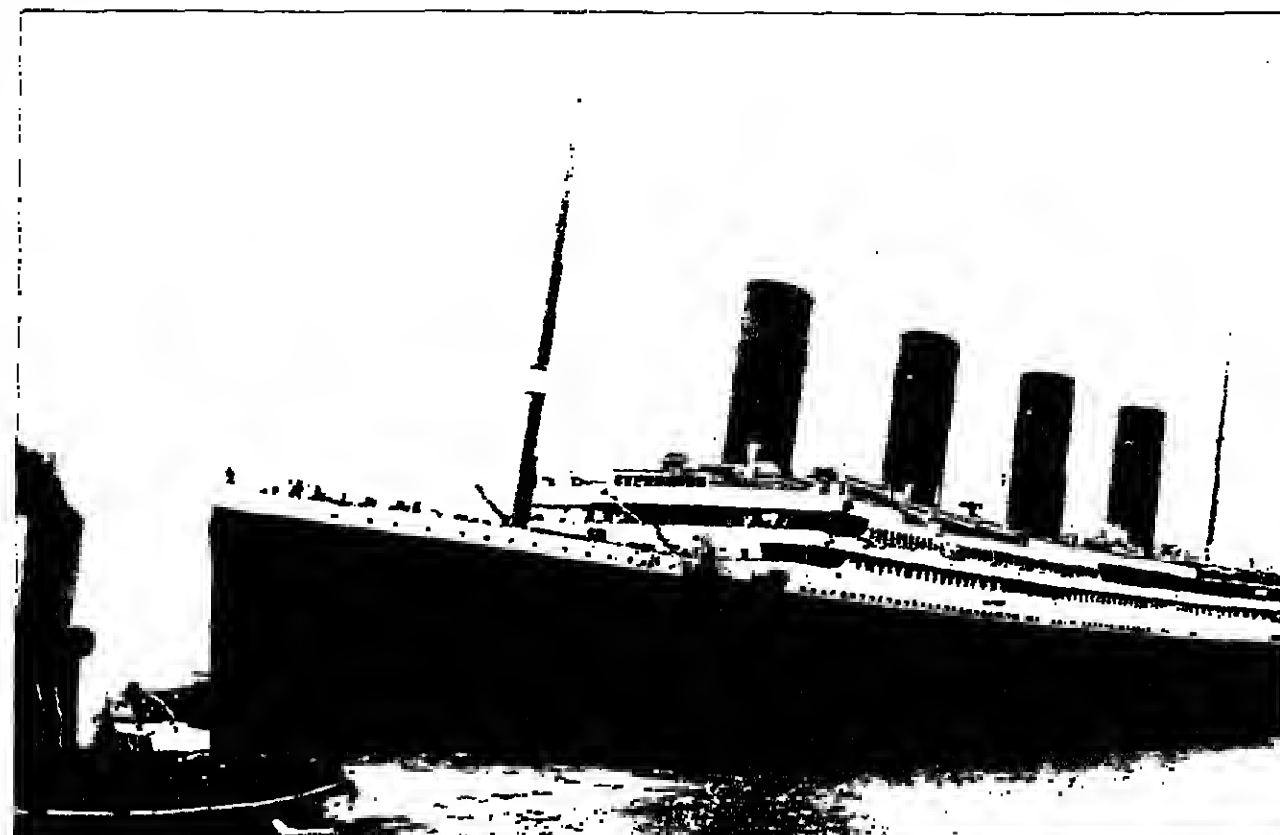
Yet, the publicity surrounding the latest sinkship cannot account for our fascination with the Titanic. On a flight out of Beirut recently, I found three passengers — two Lebanese and a Frenchman — reading

books about the ship, one of them Walter Lord's original account of the disaster that inspired A Night to Remember, another Robert Ballard's record of his underwater discovery of the wreck.

Of course, the disaster has long been regarded as symbolic — of the class system that lay like a cancer at the heart of British society, of the arrogance of power that would be swept away in the world war which broke out two years later. And it's easy to see how the nobility of sacrifice shown by those who believed in women and children first — the rules of war which held true in the 19th century — was abandoned amid the final savagery aboard the doomed ship when "every man for himself" was so soon to encapsulate the chaos of our 20th-century wars.

Several Arabs have insisted to me that the ship's fate proves how false are our superior claims for Western technology (along with Cruise missiles), Stealth bombers and other anti-Saddam devices) and that God truly proved greater than man when the Titanic went down (God presumably being represented by the iceberg). Yet far away, in Duhlin, Kevin Myers has been arguing in the Irish Times that the new awareness of the vessel's fate should help his countrymen come to regard the Titanic as an Irish story. It was, after all, designed by Irishmen and built by Irishmen (at Harland and Wolff in Belfast).

I partially subscribe to this theory, although it is not a romantic one: in reality, the Irish built the ship, the British sank it — and drowned a lot of Irishmen and women in the process. But it was the last great Anglo-Irish project before the 1916 Rising (which was also, in its way, an Anglo-Irish



The Titanic, photographed by the Daily Mirror prior to its maiden voyage

project, though with somewhat greater ramifications). Andrews, the Irish designer, remains one of the tragedy's heroes, along with Captain Smyth, who spent some of his minutes issuing his crew with guns to control the crowds round the lifeboats.

It was George Bernard Shaw (another Irishman) who saw through our hypocrisy. Only the English, he wrote after the sinking, could turn into a hero a man who steered his brand new liner at full speed into an iceberg and then started shooting his passengers.

In Cameron's new version of the disaster, it is First Officer Murdoch who starts shooting (at Irishmen, of course) as the steerage hordes try to save their lives.

And it is significant — though missed by the critics — that the new Titanic is distinctly anti-British. Courage is shown by the "unsink-

able" Mollie Browne but especially by the fictitious American Winslett-DiCaprio duo. British passengers are almost invariably stuck-up, deceitful or violent. Kenneth More's avuncular Lightholler has been replaced by a nightmare school prefect who points his revolver at the steerage hordes and screams at them: "Get back — or I'll shoot you all like dogs."

But the star of all the Titanic films — and of our fascination — remains the ship itself. Fr F.W. Browne was an Irish priest who travelled on the very first Southampton-Queenstown sector of the Titanic's transatlantic route and took a remarkable series of photographs of the first day and a half of the doomed voyage. His last picture of the Titanic — the very last photograph ever — shows a ship of grace and power, sinkable perhaps but too beautiful to die, a

vessel whose streamlined funnels speak of the future rather than the past.

Some have suggested a sexual message in the Titanic saga, the virgin ship on its maiden voyage ravaged by the iceberg. In an earlier American film of the sinking — in which George C. Scott plays a bug-eyed Captain Smyth — a female Titanic passenger is raped by a White Star Line crew member only three minutes before the ice-berg is seen penetrating the vulnerable iron skin of the ship.

Ultimately, the ship is one-reason why Titanic could win no best actor awards. Because the best actor is the machine which, in an odd way, makes Cameron's repulsive 10 seconds of silence for the dead at the Oscars ceremony — that's one Hollywood second for every 150 victims — all the more seedy.

Yet there is one sequence in the film of unmistakable beauty and power, a few seconds that explain the ship's enduring fascination. It shows the Titanic on its last day, disappearing in the late afternoon across a massive expanse of pale green Atlantic as the old lady survivor recounts her story. "It was the last time," she says, "that sunlight would ever shine upon the Titanic." And it is this element of inevitable death that draws the world back, again and again to that April night in 1912. Glorious to the end, its lights blazing over the night-time sea, the story of the Titanic is about the hour of our death. I think that's why my father — dead these last six years — often talked about the ship that died on his birthday.

The Independent

boat with our hearts in our throats. Then we saw it sink." Shawnee was cared for by the Hebrew Sheltering Society when she arrived in New York. She later boarded a train for Youngstown after being paid \$150 by the White Star Line for her lost belongings.

Witnesses and relatives reported that when she left for Lebanon to see her dying son, her hair was jet black. A year after the Titanic tragedy, her hair was completely white.

Gerious Yousseff: From Lebanon, travelling with the passengers named above, Yousseff died; his body was recovered in the aftermath of the Titanic sinking (Body label #312). He was buried at Mt. Olivet Cemetery, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on May 10, 1912.

Little else is known about the lives of the other Arabs who perished on that dreadful evening.

Not all the Arab passengers were ever fully identified. Following is the list of names, based on common recognition, of the 74 passengers who were reportedly among 165 Arabs whose tragedies are a part of the immortal tale of the sinking of the Titanic. (Survivors are identified following their listing.)

Second Class Passengers: Marie Thuillard Jerwan (Survivor), Nicholas Nasrallah Nasser, Adele Nasrallah Nasser (S), Ellen Toomey (S); Third Class Passengers, Ali Ahmed, William Ali, Gerios Assaf, Mariana Assaf (S), Ali Assam, Makala Attalah, Solomon Attalah, Banoura Ayoub (S), Tannous Betros (S), Akar Boulos (S), Hanna

Boulos (S), Joseph Sultana Boulos (S), Laura Boulos (S), Joseph Kareem Caram, Maria Elias Kareem Caram, Nassef Belmenly Cassem (S), Emir Farres Chebab (S), Elias Dibo, Tannous Doharr, Elias Elias, John Elias, Joseph Elias, Shawnee George Joseph Wahbee (S), M. Houssein Hassan, Betros Khalil, Zahie Khalil, Saad Khalil, Neshan Krekorian, Sarkis Lahowd, Ali Lam (S), Len Lam, Fahim Leeni (S), Hanna Mamee (S), Hanna Mansour, Fatima Masselmanny (S), Hanna Moubarek (S), Amenia Moubarek (S), George Moubarek (S), William Geogre Moubarek (S), Maria Nackid (S), Said Nackid (S), Mary Mowad Nackid (S), Toufik Nahill, Adele Kiamie Najib (S), Mustafa Nasr, Saade Jean Nassr, Razi Raibid, Khalil Saad (S), Amin Saad, Elias Samaan, Hanna Samaan, Youssef Samaan, Arsoun Sirayanian, Thomas Tannous, Thelma Thomas (S), Assad Alexander Thomas (S), Charles Thomas, John Thomas, John Thomas Jr., Assad Torfa, Anna Razi Touma (S), George Touma (S), Hannah Touma (S), Anna Sofia Turja (S), Yousif Wazli, Antoni Yasbeck, Celiney Alexander Yasbeck (S), Gerious Yousseff, Hileni Zabour, Tamini Zabour.

The writer is a Palestinian Arab American author and journalist. He contributed this article to the Jordan Times.

Provincial Russian town hopes to regain its former splendour

By Dorothea Huelsemeyer

ROSTOV-VELIKI — The sleepy provincial town of Rostov, with its picturesque Kremlin and dozens of churches with their onion-shaped steeples, has seen better times.

Lining the town's snow-covered streets are two-storied buildings, slanted by the wind, dating back to the last century. Panes are missing in many windows, the doors are sealed shut.

Behind the yellowed facades of what was once the commercial district is a picture of destruction. Only the supporting pillars of the buildings are still standing, surrounded by piles of rubble.

Once upon a time back in the 12th century, the town 190 kilometres from Moscow and one of the oldest in all of Russia, had gained its designation "Veliki" — "the great" — because of its

wealth. Such an honour was only bestowed on the north Russian city Novgorod.

Rostov belongs to the towns comprising the "golden ring" of Old Russian cities circling Moscow with their important monasteries. Up till the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it was still a favourite tourist destination.

But in the new period of a market economy, Mayor Anatoly Rudenko, 56, and the town's former Communist Party leader, is plagued by innumerable worries. His main one is how he can help the down-on-its-luck town of 35,000 regain its splendour.

Tourists are staying away because there are no services, not even a hotel. The textile factory is dormant because it can't compete. The four monasteries and the Kremlin citadel are dilapidated while the churches are closed because there is no

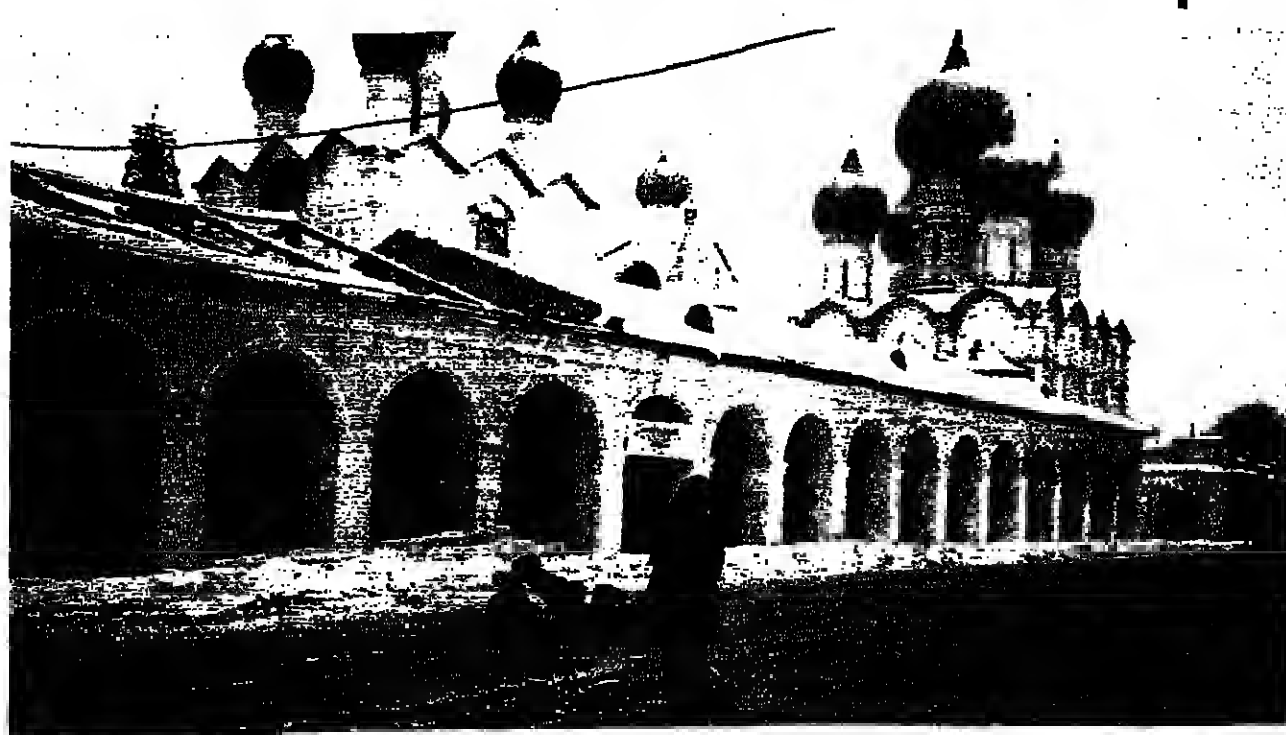
money for their restoration.

Teachers, doctors and other city employees are waiting for their back wages, even though former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin had declared on December 31, 1997 that all Moscow's debts to the provinces had been paid off.

Speaking of money: Rudenko again recently called in the directors of Rostov's 18 factories for a meeting in the grim white socialist-style mayor's office to demand that they pay their taxes.

Later, the mayor would dryly comment that the demand was "purely prophylactic" since he knows he cannot rely on funds from Moscow. Last year, Rostov should have received 43 million roubles (\$7.1 million) from the state coffers for social welfare. The town hasn't seen any of that money.

— DPA



Rostov, Russia, a once thriving provincial city, is now down on its luck (DPA photo)

Rising operational costs bring up dilemma of public transport fares

By Isam Qadmani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The government is currently reexamining public transport fares but a decision in this regard has not yet been taken, according to officials at the Ministry of Transport.

The ministry normally announces slight increases in fares from time to time depending on developments in the transport situation in the Kingdom and the operational costs, according to the sources who preferred anonymity.

Recently, the ministry raised bus fares between Amman and Sweileh by 15 fils to become 100 fils. The increase was deemed necessary in view of the longer route taken by the bus commuting between the two destinations.

Bus transport companies have been demanding that the government increase

the fares claiming that owners have sustained losses but ministry officials say that any increase should be coupled by a modernisation of the vehicles and improvement of the service.

Isam Hijazi, manager of the Hijazi bus transport company, complained that the Ministry of Transport has been promising some action but studies conducted on increasing fares normally end up on the shelf.

He claimed that the present fares do not represent the actual operational costs noting that the transport companies are now paying more for insurance, fuel and workers' wages while the fares remain unchanged.

The Hijazi transport company operates a bus service between Amman and the northern city of Irbid charging 820 fils per passenger. The fare has not been

changed for many years. Mr. Hijazi said his company has brought in modern vehicles at a time when the route between Amman and Irbid was extended as it now passes through Jerash. He said that the ministry has promised to raise the fare to JD1.150 but nothing has yet materialised and the company is now operating at a loss.

Mohammad Khashman, manager of the Esblieh transport company supported Mr. Hijazi's demands but he said that increases should be made gradually.

He said that operational cost rose by 400 per cent over the past ten years in terms of customs, fuel, workers' wages, spareparts and insurance noting that the losses have adversely affected the transport service and rendered the transport companies unable to improve the service.

Jordan cement firm sale faces domestic opposition

By Suleiman Al Khalidi
Reuters

AMMAN — Jordan's plan to sell a 33 per cent stake in its sole cement firm may be hurt by stiff domestic opposition, part of a growing public debate on privatisation, investors and officials said Saturday.

They said internal opposition by the firm's board and a vocal parliamentary opposition to the sale of the shares to a strategic international partner have combined to put curbs on the latest step to proceed with the sale.

This week the government, after almost two years of indecision, awarded leading Egyptian investment bank EFG Hermes the mandate to act as its financial adviser to the sale.

The government has until recently preferred the sale to a strategic foreign investor in the industry.

Awarding the adviser role to EFG Hermes does not rule out such a sale, but the government has begun to suggest it was open to other options, including a private

placement.

"This would be the beginning of the end of the company if the government insists on a strategic partner (investor)," said Hamdi Al Tabaa, chairman of Jordan Cement Factories.

The firm's own board unanimously told the government it was against a strategic partner, which the firm feared would then gain a veto over decisions on production and exports.

Investors say political infighting combined with a public debate which has vilified privatisation as asset-stripping amid nationalist fears of foreign control of the economy may put brakes on the government's drive to conclude the deal soon.

Some decision-makers are now leaning towards offering the sale to local investors or a long-term Arab investor.

The selection of Hermes, the only regional outfit competing against nine international investment banks, has caused ripples in international investment circles, with some saying such a choice may discourage them from

considering Jordan in future deals.

Officials confirmed the Egyptian firm was chosen after a World Bank scoring system giving a 60-40 per cent weighting respectively to technical and financial proposals, which critics say tilts the balance to the most price competitive.

Jordan Cement Factories, a blue-chip firm and one of the jewels in Jordan's limited sell-off of holdings, is 49.6 per cent owned by the government. It enjoys a monopoly until 2001.

The last year has been a difficult time for the firm as demand has slumped from Asia and uncertainty hung over the fate of the Middle East peace process, hampering prospects of capturing the lucrative Palestinian market.

The other nine investment banks which met a deadline of Feb. 28 to submit proposals were Merrill Lynch, Salomon Brothers, Citibank, Flemings, Credit Commercial Francais, Credit Agricole (Indo Suez), Societe Generale, HSBC and KPMG.

They presented financial proposals which ranged from 0.375 per cent to 1.9 per cent of the transaction size.

But Hermes topped a short list of four, ahead of Salomon, Credit Agricole (Indo Suez) and Merrill Lynch, with its highest score on technical evaluation helped by a competitive 0.40 per cent pricing, investors say.

One French firm was disqualified because it had a deal with a cement producer who was interested in acquiring a stake.

The government, lacking a coherent privatisation scheme, has wavered since it first announced the plans to sell a substantial share as part of an IMF-directed privatisation.

It had a disappointing start in an attempt to attract international cement producers such as French Lafarge, whom the government thought would help harness expertise and infuse much needed capital to help the firm undertake ambitious multi-million dollar expansion schemes.

The latest effort at World Bank behest came last year when it was decided a financial adviser would best expedite the deal, estimated to bring as much as \$100 million to government coffers once it is concluded, investors say.

Indonesia pursues new IMF reform deal

JAKARTA (R) — Indonesia announced Saturday implementation of the first of a series of new reforms agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to lift the nation out of deep economic crisis.

The official Antara news agency said the government had issued a presidential decree asking companies to report the extent of their overseas debt, one of the major problems bedeviling the economy.

Indonesian companies owe some \$74 billion in overseas debt, and the burden has cast a long shadow over efforts to pull the nation out of its worst economic crisis in decades.

On Friday, the government announced a 117-point reform package aimed at ending the crisis and announced target dates for implementation of all key points. Some 46 have already been implemented.

It said efforts would be made at once to help debtors and creditors resolve the private debt problem.

The decree calling for the debt reports, dated April 8, said companies should, within two weeks, provide the government with details of principal and interest rates, lending conditions, grace periods if any and names of creditors.

Companies which fail to comply will be subject

to administrative penalties in accordance with law, it said.

This decree will provide the first estimate of the amount of debt that needs to be restructured, the government said.

Meanwhile, the United States welcomed Indonesia's new reform package and offered \$1 billion in trade finance as an incentive for President Subarto to implement the measures.

"The key to its success is the Indonesian government's implementation now and over the long term," U.S. Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin said in a statement.

Citing the agreement, the U.S. Export-Import Bank said it was willing

to provide up to \$1 billion in short-term financing to Jakarta. The short-term financing would help U.S. exporters do business in Indonesia and help Indonesian firms buy U.S. goods.

The reform deal unveiled Friday was Indonesia's third such agreement with the IMF in less than six months. The programme, agreed after more than three weeks of talks, will overhaul the way business is done in Indonesia if fully implemented.

Hoping to convince sceptics this will be done, the government set target dates for implementing all key points. It promised a new anti-monopoly law by the end of the year, moves to set up a bankruptcy law and a special bankruptcy court by April 22 and regulations for winding up of companies, mergers and acquisitions by the end of September.

The government promised transparent and competitive bidding for public infrastructure contracts, ministerial statements and newspaper advertisements to explain official decisions, and

procedures to deal with public complaints.

"This agreement supports a comprehensive programme designed to restore financial stability and growth in Indonesia," Mr. Rubin said. "The United States and the international community have a major stake in seeing Indonesia succeed in its efforts."

The Export-Import Bank said it was "encouraged" by Indonesia's progress in addressing the country's financing and banking problems.

"I believe that the implementation of IMF reforms is essential for Indonesia in its recovery programme for the benefit of its local economy," bank chairman, James Harmon, said in a statement.

"The bank has remained open to consider credit-worthy business in Indonesia, and with proper structuring, is willing to significantly increase short-term financing to provide a bridge to long-term economic growth for U.S. exporters and the Indonesian economy," he added.



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THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com

ACROSS

- Necklace units
- Green shade
- Casino
- Calculation
- Used used candles
- Eastern leader
- 8 on a sundial
- Original
- End of a misconception
- Rendering harmless
- Home
- Fixed charge
- Al or Bobby at auto racing
- Crafty critter
- Prevarications
- Island just south of Naxos
- Elitist novel
- Adam
- Nonconformist
- Red explorer?
- High-pitched blues
- Machu Picchu resident
- Hias no confidence in
- "Nana" star
- Very dry, as wine
- Famous cookie man
- Human seat
- Bar for lifting
- Icons
- Reverse
- Beitell
- Calamities
- Mobutu Sese
- Seko's country
- Urban roads
- abbr.
- End of demo?
- 62 Aquatic mammal
- 63 Manufactured
- 64 Various functions
- 65 Robin homes

DOWN

- Thin wire nails
- Too weird
- Elite social category

ACROSS

- 14
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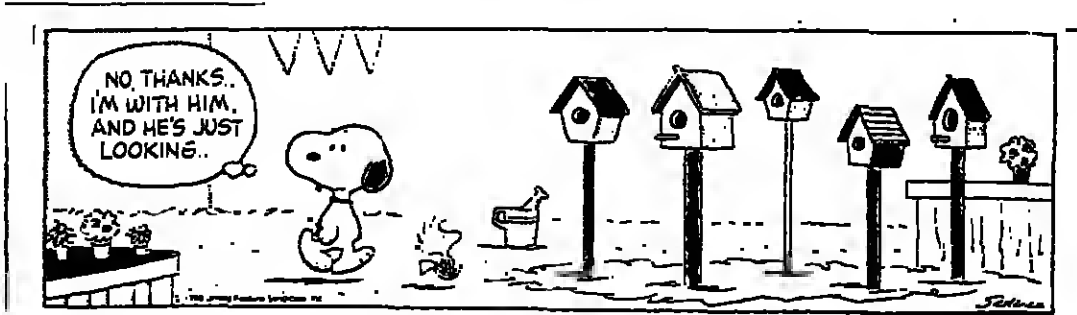
ACROSS

- AMAH
- ASPCA
- CHAN
- LONI
- BAILS
- ROSA
- POCAHONTAS
- APIER
- STEWART
- PONTIAC
- ALTOS
- ROE
- SKATES
- INTERNET
- LOCHES
- OGEES
- ALE
- ARIA
- ABNER
- GILA
- NEED
- SNODD
- NEVER
- GASMETEER
- SIRENS
- AMI
- AMINO
- COCHISE
- APTNESS
- DIPAL
- KINGPHILIP
- MIRE
- IRENE
- MIDI
- SEAR
- DEBAR
- OASIS

DOWN


- 40
- Utters in a frenzy
- 44
- Cap rim
- 45
- Aggressive giantess
- 55
- "Dies" (day of wrath)
- 49
- Ways to walk
- 56
- Mech-jets
- 58
- Fort Worth sch.

Peanuts




NO THANKS, I'M WITH HIM, AND HE'S JUST LOOKING...

Andy Capp



DON'T TELL ME, I KNOW LET THE SIDE DOWN

Mutt'n' Jeff



QUIET, YOU! CAN'T YOU READ? THIS IS A HOSPITAL ZONE!

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 12, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Check out the possibilities during the day, but don't make a final decision until tonight. By then you'll be more apt to be swayed by a pretty face or a compelling argument.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You continue to be very influential. You're not doing much talking, but you're doing a lot of listening. That gives you the advantage right there. You know where the other people stand, not only physically, but also intellectually.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) This is a great day to clean your closets. If you haven't worn it in over three years, get rid of it. There's someone in the world who will appreciate it more than you do. Once you create some space, you'll have an excuse to go shopping.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) The controversy continues. You don't really like conflicts, although some of your friends and family seem to relish them. Not to worry. By this evening, tempers will cool down and a compromise might even be reached.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) It looks like more money is coming in again today. This could be from an inheritance, legacy or gift, or simply something you find. Clean out your closet and garage. You might discover that an item you've owned for years has appreciated in value.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Errands may keep you busy for most of the day, but save a time for a special treat. Is there a beautiful place you can get to before nightfall? You and your mate need the reward.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) To all outward appearances, you're merely doing your shopping. But internally, you're having a raging debate over just about every item you consider. Later in the day you shop, the easier it will be for you to make decisions.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You'll be getting stronger, and that's a welcome relief. There are several things to be checked off your list. The more you can complete before noon, the more powerful you'll be later in the day.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Your workload is about to increase, so you'd better get prepared. Unfortunately, you're more in the mood to play. If you early want to make your life easier, you'll do some planning tonight to ensure that you're ready.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) This is a better day to play with friends. If you don't have an invitation already, call around and generate one. People will be excited to have you come over. That's probably a better idea than having everybody over to your place.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You may run into a conflict with an older person during the middle of the day. Prepare yourself this morning. You're in a good position to win this argument, especially if you've done your homework.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) It will be easier to make a sensible decision now. You've been spending money without forethought. You have that tendency anyway, but lately it's been awful. Now you'll shop for bargains with renewed enthusiasm. Start this morning, with a garage sale.

Birthstone of April: Diamond — Amethyst.

THE BETTER HALF

By Glasbergen



"Midlife crisis?"

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

LWLT
NUKKS
DREBIG
NEWECH

Answers: LIVES, KNUCK, BIG DREAM, CHEMIST

Business

A review of n

Thousands of J

at Egypt's Sh

ACCORDIN

Jordan Kuwait E

merge during se

REUTERS

The Business

Major Currencies & Cross

Currency	USD	DEM	SFR
US Dollar	1.0000	1.9360	1.9360
DE Mark	0.5457	1.0000	1.9360
GB Sterling	1.6745	1.9471	1.9360
CH Franc	2.5604	1.2027	1.9360
JP Yen	0.0075	1.4158	1.9360
CA Dollar	0.7013	1.2549	1.9360
IT Lira	0.0006	1.2111	1.9360
NL Guilder	0.4872	0.8776	1.9360
FR Franc	0.1637	2.2505	1.9360

Currency	USD	JOD	SAR
US Dollar	1.0000	0.7100	2.4666
Jordan Dinar	1.4134	1.0000	2.4666
Saudi Riyal	2.2567	1.1881	1.0000
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8800	0.3760
Qatar Dinar	0.2345	0.1747	1.7020
Kuwait Dinar	2.2141	2.5234	1.7020
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1920	1.7020
Lebanese L1000	0.65	0.4642	1.4441
Egyptian	2.7927	0.2075	0.2973

Oil	Last	Previous
Brent	13.27	12.93
WTI	15.57	15.67
Brent	13.27	12.93
Dubai	12.14	11.74
LL Gas	153.00	0.00

Commodity	Last	Previous
Coffee (c/lb)	147.82	147.82
Cocoa (c/lb)	1924	1924
Sugar (c/lb)	255.6	255.6
Wheat (c/lb)	20.02	20.02
Soya (c/lb)	148	148
Tea (c/lb)	0	0
Barley (c/lb)	460	460

Metal	Bid	Offer
Gold (oz's)	310.25	311.25
Silver (oz's)	6.45	6.45
Palladium (oz's)	426	429
Al (3 Months)	1426	1441
Cu (3 Months)	1782	1787
Zinc (3 Months)	1742	1746
Nickel (3 Months)	530	537
Lead (3 Months)	5370	5380

Energy

Commodity

Energy

Commodity

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Business & Finance

Jordan Times, Sunday, April 12, 1998 9

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Thousands of Jordanians spend holiday at Egypt's Sharm Al Sheikh resort

** ACCORDING TO several travel and tourism agents, around 7,400 Jordanians have spent the 'Eid Al Adha holiday at Egyptian resorts. Confirming the figure, Royal Wings Director General Ahmed Qantar said 900 tourists were transported on 18 flights and about 6,500 tourists were transported on 12 Royal Jordanian and 10 Egypt Air flights.

"Ninety per cent of the flights went to Sharm Al Sheikh to the extent that a number of these flights were delayed because the airport could not accommodate the crowds as a result of the continued air traffic carrying Jordanian tourists," Mr. Qantar indicated.

Jordan Kuwait Bank, Union Bank may merge during second half of this year

** ISSAM SALFITI, chairman of the Union Bank for Savings and Investment, has confirmed that preliminary negotiations were underway for a merger with the Jordan Kuwait Bank. Should the merger negotiations between the two banks succeed, Mr. Salfiti expected the merger to take place during the second half of this year.

He said that the structure of the board of directors would be fair and satisfactory for both sides if a merger agreement is reached noting that the Central Bank has not been contacted officially in this regard.

"After the merger, the bank will be known as the Jordanian Kuwait Union Bank," Mr. Salfiti said indicating that the two merging banks have a JD40 million combined capital with shareholders' equity reaching about JD35 million (Al Ra'i + Al Dustour + Al Aswaq).

Safeway considering the tough way to face 'unfair state competition'

By Suha Ma'ayeh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Safeway, facing unfair competition from subsidised state-run cooperatives, said on Saturday it was considering plans to lay off several employees at its two supermarkets in Amman and to sue the cooperatives.

The move follows a tug-of-war going on for months between the cooperatives, set up exclusively for over 250,000 military and civil personnel, and supermarkets facing massive losses because of unfair competition.

Safeway General Manager Azam Masri told the Jordan Times Saturday the establishment was considering laying off some of its 1,000 employees working at both branches because competition had reduced their sales and potential revenue.

"Dismissing employees will surely hurt many families," he said, adding that Safeway had run out of other cost-cutting options following months of unsuccessful protests over abuses by the Civil Consumer Society (CCS) and the Military Consumer Society (MCS). Both cooperatives are exempt from paying

income tax and from paying taxes on locally-produced goods.

While the CCS pays some customs on imported goods, the MCS does not.

"I expect other similar companies will lay off employees soon in order to survive in the market," he stressed.

Mr. Masri said Safeway was also seeking to sue the CCS and the MCS.

"Several lawyers working for Safeway are currently considering the option of taking them to court. They are studying all aspects of the case," he added.

"I believe that both cooperatives are not acting on their own," he said. However, he refused to point the finger at any specific party.

Despite repeated denials by the MCS and the CCS that they were letting in only beneficiaries, many Jordanians, including this reporter, have enjoyed trouble-free shopping at many of their outlets though CCS officials are generally stricter in making exceptions.

Many private sector traders have condemned the government for turning a blind eye and for pursuing

such policies that would only discourage businessmen from investing in Jordan.

"On the one hand, the government is desperate to promote its much-opposed privatisation scheme by preaching day and night about greater economic liberalisation and giving a bigger role to the private sector," said one businessman.

"However, they have shown no interest in protecting the private sector and its multi-million dollar investments," he added.

The government says it has repeatedly written letters to both cooperatives asking them to limit sales to beneficiaries.

Mr. Masri said the government, facing rising unemployment and poverty, was concentrating more on the issue of "economic recession rather than the free market concept."

"They are focusing on citizens at the expense of investors," he said.

Safeway and other giant supermarkets, backed by the Chamber of Commerce, have written several letters to Industry and Trade Minister Hani Mulki asking him to intervene.

Plight of Hammamat Ma'in spa expected to end within 10 days

By Amy Henderson
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Senior Jordan Investment Corporation (JIC) officials said Saturday that they expect the corporation to sign a long-delayed deal on the management of the beleaguered Hammamat Ma'in within the coming ten days.

Board Chairman Mohammad Batayneh told the Jordan Times that a French-owned hotel group will assume the management and a Jordanian company will acquire the land lease of the 16-year-old spa village embedded in the mountains south of Madaba.

According to Mr. Batayneh, ACCOR, a conglomerate of French hotel chains, will obligate itself to renovating and upgrading the now-outdated spa facilities to the tune of \$5 million over a three to four year period.

The Jordanian company, headed by Ali Ghandour, is still being formed, but JIC Deputy Chairman Munther Saudi said the company will assume the lease for the property — which includes a public hot spring bath and a hotel housing health spa fed by the springs — from the JIC.

A sell-off was not possible because the spa sits on government-owned land, and, a senior source said at the time, no foreign enterprise was interested in buying the facility without being able to purchase the land. The second option proved too expensive.

The JIC, which holds 78 per cent of the spa company's equity, has blamed poor management from the outset of the project.

Capital was raised in 1986 to JD5 million with a projected total investment of JD8.9 million. The government guaranteed a loan to keep the project on track.

But by 1997, total investment amounted to JD14 million with operational profit from 1993, 1994 and 1995 at JD900,000.

The duration of the lease is 30 years, with the fee subject to review every ten years. Neither official would disclose the financial details of the pending agreement.

"We think that with this arrangement, the premium and principles on the loans drawn [for the construction of the facility] can be satisfied," said Mr. Saudi.

The Jordan Tourism and Spa Complex Company, founded in 1982 with a capital of JD2 million, was JD13 million in debt by 1997 and had annual losses totalling JD10 million which consumed the entirety of the company's JD5 million capital.

The companies law requires that any company losing more than 75 per cent of its capital should be liquidated unless the company increases and restructures its capital.

In late 1996, the spa's board of directors attempted to rectify the situation by inviting foreign investors to lease the facility and assume the spa's management after other solutions — such as selling the facility or inviting a management hotel to take over — proved unfeasible.

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But by 1997, total investment amounted to JD14 million with operational profit from 1993, 1994 and 1995 at JD900,000.

However, the volume of exports rose to 19.3 per cent to 8.2 million tonnes over the 12-month period, they said.

The drop in revenue from non-oil exports is a major concern to Iran, already hit by a drop in the price of crude oil which it relies upon for 80 per cent of its foreign currency earnings.

Earnings from exports such as carpets and pistachio nuts reached a record \$4.8 billion in 1995, but slumped to \$3.2 billion in 1996, largely due to a complex web of red tape.

REUTERS The Business of Information

Major Currencies & Cross Rates Prices as at 11/04/98 17:51									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	-	1.8225	0.8983	1.5143	128.62	1.4258	1802.25	2.0524	6.1096
DE Mark	0.5487	-	0.3280	0.8309	70.58	0.7822	988.62	1.1262	3.3522
GB Sterling	1.6715	3.0471	-	2.5312	215.08	2.3834	3012.48	3.4306	10.2122
CH Franc	0.6604	1.2027	0.3946	-	84.92	0.9410	1189.37	1.3545	4.0319
JP Yen	0.0078	1.4159	0.4646	1.1764	-	1.1078	14.00	158.45	4.7484
CA Dollar	0.7013	1.3049	0.4231	1.0794	1.11	-	1287.82	1.4706	4.3729
IT Lira	0.0005	1.0110	0.3317	0.0840	1402.92	0.7910	-	11.38	3.3890
NL Guilder	0.4872	0.8876	0.2812	0.7377	62.63	0.6944	877.89	-	2.5754
FR Franc	0.1637	0.2982	0.0978	0.24775	21.03	0.2333	33.58	33.5800	-

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	JOD	SAR	BAH	QAT	KUW	AED	LBP	EGP
US Dollar	-	0.7090	3.7501	0.3770	3.6410	0.3048	3.6723	1528.00	3.4160
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	-	6.2893	0.5317	5.1364	0.4295	5.1804	2155.15	4.8181
Saudi Riyal	0.2667	0.1891	-	0.1005	0.97	0.0812	0.98	407.46	0.9109
Bahrain Dinar	2.65	1.8807	8.9477	-	9.66	0.8077	9.74	4053.27	9.0615
Qatar Dinar	0.2746	0.1947	1.0300	1.0300	-	0.0838	1.01	419.66	0.9382
Kuwait Dinar	3.2841	2.3284	12.3166	1.2380	11.96	-	12.06	6018.06	0.9382
Emirates Dinar	0.2723	0.1930	1.0210	1.0208	0.9813	0.0829	-	416.02	0.9301
Lebanese L1000	0.65	0.4840	2.4543	0.2487	2.3829	0.1993	2.4037	-	2.2356
Egyptian	0.2927	0.2076	1.0978	0.1104	1.0659	0.0891	1.0752	447.31	-

Energy					
Oil	Last	Previous	Mid-East Currencies		
Brent	13.27	12.92	Currency	USD	DEM
WT Texas	16.57	15.67	SA Riyal	0.2667	0.4861
Bonny	13.27	12.92	AE Dirham	0.2723	0.4953
Dubai	12.14	11.74	KW Dinar	3.2841	5.9802
UL Gas	153.00	0.00	BH Dinar	0.3770	4.3359
			CY Pound	1.874	3.4154

Metal Prices			Libor Fixing				
Metal	Bid	Offer	Period	-1-	-3-	-6-	-1-
Gold (oz's)	310.25	311.25	Cncy	Month	Months	Months	Year
Silver (oz's)	6.45	6.58	USD	6.5797	5.7266	5.7656	5.8818
Platinum (oz's)	426	429	GBP	7.4635	7.5417	7.5313	7.6208
AL (3 Months)	1436	1440	JPY	0.0878	0.7813	0.8021	0.8333
CU (3 Months)	1783	1787	DEM	3.5187	3.7438	3.8688	4.0437
Zinc (3 Months)	1143	1146	FRF	3.5313	1.8641	1.7813	1.9809
Lead (3 Months)	683	687	CHF	1.5000	3.6289	3.7246	3.9375
NI (3 Months)	5370	5390	ITL	5.6420	5.2850	4.9900	-

Energy			JOD Cross Rates		
Commodity	Last	Delivery	Currency	Buy	Sell
Coffee (p/lb)	147.83	Spot	US Dollar	0.708	0.710
Cocoa (\$/ton)	1824	Spot	GB Sterling	1.1825	1.1884
Sugar (\$/ton)	285.6	Spot	DE Mark	0.388	0.3899
Wheat (\$/ton)	0	Spot	CH Franc	0.4688	0.4691
Soya (c/lb)	28.03	Spot	FR Franc	0.1157	0.1163
Tea (c/kg)	148	Spot	JP Yen	0.5497	0.5524
Barley (\$/bsh)	0	Spot	NL Guilder	0.3445	0.3482
Rice (\$/ton)	400	Spot	IT Lira	0.3924	0.3944

* Source: Central Bank of Jordan.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET											
HOUSING BANK CENTER - AMMAN - SHEIKH SAUD											
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179											
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 11/04/1998											
PAST 12 MONTHS HIGH	COMPANY'S NAME	P / E	DIV.	NO. OF SHARES	NO. OF TRANSACTIONS	VALUE TRADED JO	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE		
346,000	251,000	ARAB BANK	14.3	1.14	9	320	132830	346.00	350.00	4.00+	
2,340	1,660	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	2	0.00	12	15400	27392	1.77	1.78	.01+	
1,300	1,590	MIO. EAST INV. BK.	65.7	0.00	2	1000	1000	1.00	1.00	-	
2,680	1,660	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	9.2	7.92	3	5200	9256	1.76	1.78	.02+	
5,500	4,660	THE HOUSING BK.	17.4	2.63	2	350	1176	5.49	5.49	.01+	
920	1,590	JOR. GULF BANK	3.8	10.94	12	10300	6564	62	62	.02+	
4,020	1,910	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	9.6	5.08	10	3400	6449	7.91	1.89	.02+	
3,900	1,470	JOR. INV. FEN. BANK	12.0	0.00	2	250	668	1.99	1.87	.01+	
BANK SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 243.71 %CHG: +0.82											
2,400	1,590	JOR. FRENCH INSUR.	6.0	11.74	4	8000	16535	2.11	2.13	.02+	
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 122.66 %CHG: +0.10											
2,140	1,550	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	10.3	4.67	5	1392	2966	2.12	2.14	.02+	
1,550	960	NATL. PORTFOLIO	45.1	0.00	39	16675	18499	1.08	1.13	.05+	
1,480	1,120	KID. EAST HOTELS	18.3	0.00	3	1050	1260	1.20	1.20	-	
1,830	1,520	UNIFIED CO.	6.9	7.05	1	100	156	1.55	1.56	.01+	
810	600	UNION LAND DEV.	9	0.00	1	100	64	6.3	6.4	.01+	
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 119.16 %CHG: +0.36											
4,450	2,650	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	18.6	3.97	15	9017	24977	2.73	2.77	.04+	
4,140	3,050	JOR. PHOSPHATE MINES	8.6	3.23	2	145	450	3.20	3.10	.10+	
11,160	9,700	JOR. PETROL REFINERY	10.5	8.23	8	410	4636	10.71	10.80	.09+	
1,350	1,040	WOOLLEN INDUSTRIES	11.4	7.58	1	100	132	1.26	1.32	.06+	
5,700	3,440	ARAB PHARM. MANUF.	14.8	1.72	9	942	5055	5.35	5.37	.02+	
1,530	1,020	JOR. PIPES MANUF.	11.2	7.41	2	350	473	1.29	1.35	.06+	
570	400	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	16.9	0.00	34	16300	18150	50	50	-	
1,110	1,470	ARAB PAPER CONV. TRD.	20.5	0.00	1	300	201	67	67	-	
750	360	NATIONAL INDOS.	9	0.00	4	2600	1429	35	34	.01+	
370	810	INTERNATED PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	19	26000	10509	1.48	1.48	-	
690	500	JOR. ROCCWOOD IND.	9	0.00	1	250	130	52	52	-	
2,240	1,380	UNIV. CHEM. INDOS.	14.4	5.67	1	1000	141	1.41	1.41	-	
3	920	NATL. CABLE WIRE. N.P.C.	77.7	0.00	1	2500	288	1.14	1.35	.01+	
1,790	1,150	JOR. SULPHUR & CHEM.	14.0	4.73	1	1000	119	58	58	.01+	
1,560	1,920	ARAB PHARM. CHEM.	17.4	5.15	5	1250	1663	1.35	1.36	.01+	
1,540	810	UNIV. WOOD. INDOS.	14.8	6.45	9	4300	3997	94	93	.01+	
1,620	1,350	NATL. CHLORINE	14.0	4.73	1	1000	140	1.48	1.48	-	
1,080	810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	14.7	9.62	12	5800	6067	1.03	1.04	.01+	
1,220	860	UNION CH. & VEG.	47.7	0.00	21	24750	26055	1.05	1.05	-	
860	660	ARAB INTL. INV. TRD.	9.4	8.47	6	21497	4419	85	84	.01+	
570	800	MID. EAST CHEM.	15.38	19	13600	6706	63	65	.02+		
1,100	720	ARAB INT. FOOD FACT.	54.9	0.00	1	100	100	1.00	1.00	-	
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS INDEX: 110.32 %CHG: -0.05											
GRAND TOTAL		INDEX: 171.49 %CHG: +0.50			283	197523	343543				
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 11/04/1998											
620	480	MACH. EXP. REPT. MAIN.	31.8	0.00	7	10000	5750	56	58	.02+	
800	650	UNIV. FIN. INVEST.	9	0.00	7	10200	775	78	79	.01+	
620	360	ARAB FIN. INVEST.	9	0.00	23	18450	7934	42	43	.01+	
290	120	JOR. INDOS. MACHIN. JENCO	9	0.00	4	8000	1040	12	13	.01+	
470	240	ARAB INTL. INV. TRD.	47.2	0.00	26	110200	4419	85	84	.02+	
750	360	NATL. MULT. ZONE. RAMICO	9	0.00	7	11593	4374	38	38	-	
1	1,580	860	UNION TOBACCO 75%	9	0.00	9	5950	7946	1.58	1.61	.03+
730	550	RAJ. PHARM.	5	0.00	1	3000	10	66	66	.01+	
830	490	INDS. CERAMIC	13.1	0.00	2	250	125	51	50	.01+	
950	550	ADVANCED PHARMA. IND.	9	0.00	4	2700	1646	62	61	.01+	
740	480	NATL. POLYMER	9	0.00	12	6000	2007	43	45	.02+	
N	950	470	ORT. CALA. READING 75%	1	0.00	1	100	34	59	.01+	
N	1,000	660	NAT. ALUMINUM. 75%	46.2	0.00	10	11000	8500	70	70	-
GRAND TOTAL INDEX: 108 197893 85307											

Black reaches Hong Kong Open final

HONG KONG (AFP) — Zimbabwe's Byron Black battled through to the final of the \$340,000 Hong Kong Open with a three-set win over Canada's Sebastien Lareau Saturday.

Black saved three match points in a gruelling tussle with Lareau lasting two hours and 40 minutes before he prevailed 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, 7-6 (7/4) at Hong Kong's Victoria Park Stadium.

Black looked to be on his way to wrapping up victory after leading 5-2 in the final set and serving for the match. But a spirited fight-back from Lareau forced the match to a tiebreak which Black hung on to win.

"It was a great match. There was a lot of ups and

downs and momentum swings," said Black after his win. "I was concerned all the way. I think he really went for his shots in the final set... he seems to play better when he's down," he added.

Black meets Denmark's Kenneth Carlsen in Sunday's final. Carlsen, who is still searching for his first ATP-Tour title win after more than six years as a professional, was too strong for an off-form Thomas Johansson.

Carlsen brushed aside his Swedish opponent 6-2, 6-2 and is now hoping to end his long barren run. "I played more steady. It just worked a little bit better... I came out very strong and I

was feeling very confident. I didn't make the mistakes — I let him make them instead," eighth-seed Carlsen said.

The tall world number 76 said he was not concerned by his failure to win any of the three previous tour finals he has contested, and said he would not think about his title drought prior to the match.

"You try not to do anything different. You just try to be focused and think of it as just another game. It's just a question of trying to be the best on the day — and I have not been that on three other occasions," he said.



Manchester United midfielder Paul Scholes (L) is tackled by Liverpool captain Paul Ince (R) at Old Trafford. The FA Premiership game between United and Liverpool finished 1-1 with goals from Johnson and Owen (Reuters photo)

Owen hits United hopes

MANCHESTER (AFP) — Liverpool teenager Michael Owen put a dent in Manchester United's Premiership title ambitions with a brilliant goal, was then sent off as the teams drew 1-1 at Old Trafford on Friday night.

United stretched their lead at the top of the table to seven points but challengers Arsenal, who are at home to Newcastle on Saturday, now have four games in hand.

But the result virtually ended Liverpool's outside chance of the title as they trail United by 12 points and Arsenal by five having played two more games than the London team. United should have taken the lead in the opening minute when Ryan Giggs burst clear of the Liverpool defence.

But American goalkeeper Brad Friedel made a superb block, then defender Phil Babb cleared Paul Scholes' follow-up shot off the goal-line.

But the home side did take the lead after 12 minutes when Ronny Johnsen was left unmarked to head home David Beckham's left wing corner. It was a great start for United, but Liverpool were quick to hit back and Steve McManaman saw a close

range shot blocked by Gary Neville. He then missed a great chance after 35 minutes, when he was blasted over with only United goalkeeper Schmeichel to beat. But just a minute later 18-year-old Owen, described earlier on Friday by Brazilian legend Pele as potential World Cup star for England in June, burst past Gary Pallister and fired the equaliser past Schmeichel — his 20th goal of the season.

Then four minutes later Owen turned from hero to villain when he was sent off following a foul on Johnsen which brought his second yellow card. Giggs, who has just returned following a lengthy absence with a hamstring injury, limped off to be replaced by Ben Thomley.

If United had any thoughts they could sweep away Liverpool's 10 men in the second half they were soon dispelled. Former United player Paul Ince, now the Liverpool captain, marshalled his troops superbly and was always in the thick of the action.

And Liverpool could easily have taken the lead on the hour when Oyvind Leonhardsen broke clear and it took a brilliant full-length save from Schmeichel to deny him. United dominated the territorial play, but were mostly forced to try their luck from long range.

Andy Cole, Gary Neville, Nicky Butt and Scholes twice all fired over the bar. United manager Alex Ferguson brought on England striker Teddy Sheringham for defender Phil Neville after 65 minutes in a desperate attempt to force a winner. Liverpool, however, continued to defy the home side.

Then with two minutes remaining United came within inches of scoring the all important second goal. Cole beat goalkeeper Friedel in the air, but with the home fans already cheering as the ball headed towards the net Liverpool full back Rob Jones appeared from nowhere to clear off the line. Then in injury time Scholes had a clear sight of goal, but shot inches wide from about 12 yards. Following the match British bookmakers changed United's odds to win the title from 1-3 to 1-2, while Arsenal's odds were cut from 9-4 to 6-4.

The London team, who also play Newcastle in the FA Cup Final next month, are now 5-2 to win the League and Cup double.

Serbs balk at Champions League plan for Bosnia

SARAJEVO (AFP) — Serb security concerns have derailed a UEFA plan to have Bosnia-Herzegovina compete in European Cup club football, more than two years after the end of the war.

The ruling body for European football proposed that four clubs from the Muslim-Croat Federation and two from the Serb entity of Republika Srpska play in Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar.

The winners would be drawn in next season's European Champions League, and the runners-up in the UEFA Cup.

But Rodoljub Petkovic, secretary general of the Republika Srpska soccer association, told AFP it could not accept the proposal.

"The political and security situation is such that matches could be very risky," he said.

The same reason was invoked when Serb college students were invited to Sarajevo to bear a speech by visiting French President Jacques Chirac last Tuesday.

Five Serbs have been arrested by Muslim-Croat police since February, four of them in Sarajevo, on allegations they committed either war crimes or offences prior to the 1992-95 conflict.

Political leaders in Republika Srpska claim the arrests are an attempt by Muslim-Croat side to discourage the return of Serb refugees, despite pledges from all sides to uphold freedom of movement.

Petkovic said the Serbs had made suggestions to UEFA "based on our estimation of the security situation, which is getting even worse due to frequent arrests."

But these were "completely ignored," he said, adding that a letter was on its way to UEFA saying that the Republika Srpska soccer association now would negotiate only with its Muslim-Croat Federation counterpart.

Complicating matters is the fact that Croats have their own football association.

Ivan MIOC, general secretary of the mainly Muslim Bosnia-Herzegovina soccer association, said: "We have accepted UEFA's proposal (and) as far as I know, the (Croat) soccer association of Herceg-Bosna has accepted it as well."

If the UEFA project ever does get off the ground, the matches would be handled by neutral referees.

Celtics narrowly defeat Magic 82-80 to stay in playoffs

BOSTON (AP) — Ron Mercer sank a 15-foot (4.5-metre) jumper with 14.8 seconds left in overtime as the Boston Celtics avoided elimination from the playoff race and severely damaged Orlando's bid for a postseason spot with a 82-80 victory Friday night.

The Celtics must win their remaining five games and eighth-place New Jersey must lose its last six games for Boston to make the playoffs.

The Magic fell two games behind idle New Jersey in the Eastern Conference. Orlando has four games left.

Boston's victory also clinched a playoff berth for the Cleveland Cavaliers, who are currently sixth in the East.

Dana Barros led Boston with 26 points, including five 3-pointers in the second half. Nick Anderson scored 21 points for Orlando.

Hawks 99, Hornets 87: In Charlotte, North Carolina, Atlanta inched closer to unseating Charlotte for the fourth seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs by rallying from an 18-point first-quarter deficit to beat the slumping Hornets.

Steve Smith scored 19 of his 23 points in the last three quarters as Atlanta won for the fourth time in six games and cut Charlotte's lead over the Hawks to one game. Both teams have five games left, including a matchup against each other next Friday night in Atlanta.

Eldridge Recasner added 23 points and Mookie Blaylock, who hit four of seven attempts from 3-point range, scored 13 of his 19 in the final 10:08 as the Hawks improved to 3-0 against Charlotte this season.

Glen Rice and Matt Geiger had 17 points apiece for Charlotte, which lost for the sixth time in eight games.

Timberwolves 107, 76ers 102: In Minneapolis, Sam Mitchell scored a season-high 29 points, including the go-ahead basket with 48 seconds left, and the Minnesota Timberwolves overcame Allen Iverson's 43 points to get their franchise-record 41st victory.

Mitchell added 11 rebounds as Minnesota (41-36) clinched at least a .500 record for the first time since joining the NBA in 1989.

Kevin Garnett had 26 points and 16 rebounds for the Wolves, who have five games left to record their first-ever winning record. Stephon Marbury scored 28 points for Minnesota, while Derrick Coleman had 19 points and 12 rebounds for the Sixers.

Heat 111, Raptors 105, OT: In Toronto, Tim Hardaway scored 28 points and Marty Conlon hit four free throws in the last minute of overtime as Miami handed Toronto its franchise-record 62nd loss.

Voshon Lenard scored 24 points and Mourning had 23 for Miami, which has already clinched the Atlantic Division title and appears certain to be the No. 2 seed in the first round of the playoffs.

Doug Christie scored 26 points for Toronto, while rookie Tracy McGrady had 12 points, 15 rebounds and five assists.

Spurs 99, SuperSonics 84: In San Antonio, Jaren Jackson scored a career-high 31 points as the San Antonio Spurs, playing without injured center David Robinson, beat the Seattle SuperSonics.

The loss dropped the Sonics 1 1/2 games behind Utah for the best record in the Western Conference.

Rookie Tim Duncan had 28 points and 17 rebounds for San Antonio, which lost Robinson when he was knocked unconscious Wednesday by an elbow thrown by Utah's Karl Malone. He is expected to be out at least through the weekend as he recovers from a concussion.

Seattle was led by Gary Payton's 20 points.

Jazz 126, Clippers 109: In Salt Lake City, Howard Eisley scored a career-high 22 points as the Utah Jazz defeated the Los Angeles Clippers in their first game at the Delta Center without Karl Malone.

Malone was serving a one-game suspension for elbowing David Robinson on Wednesday. Malone, who saw his streak of 543 consecutive starts come to an end, had led the Jazz in scoring in 39 of their previous 41 games.

Jeff Hornacek had 23 points and Chris Morris, starting for the first time this season, added 16 for the Jazz.

The Jazz won their sixth straight game and 10th home game in a row, while the Clippers lost their seventh straight.

Maurice Taylor led Los Angeles with 22 points off the bench.

Rockets 97, Kings 85: In Sacramento, California, Hakeem Olajuwon had 24 points, 11 rebounds and six assists as the Houston Rockets won their third straight game.

Clyde Drexler had 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Rockets.

Charles Barkley reagravated a groin injury and left the game with 10:38 remaining in the fourth quarter.

Corliss Williamson scored 20 points and Anthony Johnson had 19 for the Kings, who have lost 15 of 16 games.

Sacramento played without star guard Mitch Richmond, who has missed seven of the last nine games with a sore right knee.

Suns 114, Lakers 105: In Inglewood, California, Antonio McDyeess had a career-high 37 points and 11 rebounds as the Phoenix Suns defeated the Los Angeles Lakers for their first victory at the Forum in three years.

The loss snapped the Lakers' six-game winning streak and dropped them three games behind Utah in the battle for best record in the Western Conference. The Lakers also remained 1 1/2 games behind Seattle in the Pacific Division.

Shaquille O'Neal scored 34 points and Mario Bennett added 18 points and a career-high 14 rebounds for the Lakers, who had their 10-game home winning streak snapped.

Malone suspended and fined

NEW YORK (AFP) — Utah's Karl Malone, the reigning Most Valuable Player, was suspended one game without pay and fined \$5,000 by the National Basketball Association Friday for accidentally elbowing San Antonio center David Robinson in the head.

Malone was to sit out Friday night against the Los Angeles Clippers with the suspension costing him \$62,426 in salary. Robinson was knocked unconscious by the blow in Wednesday's game and will miss Friday's home game against Seattle.

At the 9:32 mark of the first quarter, Malone was cutting through the lane and was grabbed in the arm by Robinson, who caught an elbow in the jaw after Malone swung around. Robinson was unconscious for a couple of minutes before he was revived and helped to the locker room. He was hospitalised for observation.

Malone said the incident was unintentional and the league agreed, though it levied the fine and suspension to hold the veteran forward accountable.

"While I do not believe that Malone intentionally elbowed Robinson, players



Karl Malone have a responsibility not to recklessly swing their elbows in a manner that could cause injury to another player," said NBA senior vice president of basketball operations Rod Thorn.

The loss Friday is greater for the Spurs than the Jazz. San Antonio is battling the Phoenix Suns for fourth place in the Western Conference, holding a half-game lead, but must contend with the SuperSonics, who are a half-game behind the Jazz for the West lead. The Clippers are out of the playoff picture.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Brazil's 1954 World Cup coach dies

SAO PAULO (AFP) — Zeze, who was Brazil's coach at the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland, died in hospital here on Friday. The 90-year-old, who also coached Brazilian clubs Fluminense, Vasco, Botafogo, Corinthians and Sao Paulo, as well as clubs in Chile, Uruguay and Portugal, had been in hospital 25 days before dying of pneumonia. Alfredo Moreira Junior, known as Zeze, was coach on the years preceding Brazil's phenomenal success: Brazil went on to win the World Cup in 1958, 1962, 1970 and 1994.

World Cup tickets on sale

PARIS (AFP) — About 110,000 World Cup tickets will be on sale by telephone to fans from 18 European countries from 8 a.m. (0600 GMT) on April 22, the World Cup organising committee announced on Friday. The tickets will be for first and second round matches with the exception of the opening match between Brazil and Scotland on June 10. The tickets will go on sale in 18 countries in Europe, including Germany, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Norway, Holland, Portugal, Sweden, as long as the caller has an address in one of those countries. The reservations will be on a first come, first serve basis, with a limit of four tickets per match for each person, and an absolute limit of 16 tickets for each person. To undertake this, the organising committee are setting up an exchange with 90 operators receiving calls, and two thirds of those will be able to answer calls in many foreign languages. The numbers to call will be publicised by the organising committee on April 17.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMARA HIRSCH
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TIMED TO PERFECTION

Both vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH
A 7
K 73
Q 107
A K 10784

WEST
A 10963
Q 10
Q 652
J 9

EAST
K Q 54
Q 94
J 43
Q 852

SOUTH
A 62
A 652
A J 98
A 3

The bidding:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
10 Pass 20 Pass
20 Pass 30 Pass
30 Pass 40 Pass
40 Pass 50 Pass
50 Pass 60 Pass
60 Pass 70 Pass

Opening lead: Jack of A

Aces and kings are undervalued in the point count. Both North and South showed fine appreciation of their prime cards in getting to a reasonable small slam in hearts.

Once North jumped in hearts on Tuesday, May 7, 1996.

The second round of the auction, both players could find first- and second-round controls. North's singleton spade was the key holding for slam.

West led the jack of spades, and declarer realised that there was no hope if trumped did not split 3-2. Given that, the contract hinged either on a 4-2 club division or a winning guess in diamonds. Declarer's play was a model of technique.

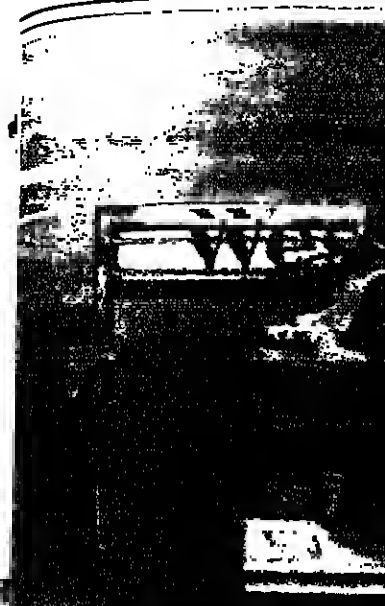
The ace of spades was won, followed by the ace of clubs and a club ruff. Had West overruled, declarer would have had to hope that the defender started with three trumps and the outstanding hearts would fall under the ace-king. Since West would then have been a favorite to hold diamond length, South would have played West for the queen of diamonds. When West followed, declarer cashed the ace and king of hearts, heaving a sigh of relief when neither defender showed out.

The king of clubs was cashed for a spade discard, followed by a single ruff to get up two long cards on the table. The last spade was trumped on the table and established clubs were led. East could ruff at any time, but that would be the only trick for the defense.

First Division Jazireh m

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AN — Leaders Al Jazireh m... in the inaugural match of... Basketball Championship... Al Jazireh top the stand... difference and are joined by Al... in the first time in Jordanian... Al Jazireh had been Al Othaybi... in the first round which they... an unbeaten streak. However... manage a dramatic 57-53 win over... their only match in Al Jazireh... second round... Al Othaybi... Al Jazireh... small points and the game... could be closely fought during the... Al Jazireh having the upper hand... to beat the tourists in both... game judging by the results to be... games up Al Jazireh... stand...



Williams Formula One driver David Coulthard at the start of the 1998 British Grand Prix at Silverstone. Coulthard finished the race in 11th place, 1:28.130, behind Mika Hakkinen. The Argentine driver finished in 12th place.

Illies edge Braves

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Curt Schilling won a matchup with Greg Maddux at a time Mike Lieberthal singled to score on the bottom of the ninth inning, giving the Philadelphia Phillies a 3-2 win over the Atlanta Braves.

In the 11th career shutout, Schilling, 30, a two-hitter and struck out 10. He gave up one run.

Maddux worked eight innings, giving the Braves a 1-0 lead in the top of the first. Jeffery and Scott Rolen walked, but Lieberthal grounded a one-out single to end the inning.

Schilling outduelled Maddux, 41, at Atlanta. Schilling struck out 10 batters and the deciding run was scored.

Matchup: Maddux got 15 ground balls and struck out five. He allowed five hits and one run before being lifted after 9 1/2 innings.

It was a four-time Cy Young winner, who had three starts this season despite an injury.

Atlanta has an 0-3 ERA in three starts. He struck out nine into 20 innings and gave up one run.

Expos 0: In Montreal, Henry Rodriguez celebrated his return with a career-high 10 hits, including a home run and two RBIs, leading Kevin Lapp and the Expos over the Cubs.

Traded to the Cubs last season, Rodriguez was a three-run homer that kept the Expos in the lead.

Expos 1992 when he singled in the ninth to complete his 5-for-5 evening.

Expos 12-11: The Expos picked a three-hitter the two games ago. He also drove in a pair of runs.

Brown gave the Cubs an early lead, but his major league-leading sixth home run in the sixth — thanks to a lead-off home run by Mark Loretta.

Expos 5, Mets 3: In Milwaukee, Jeremy Brown hit his major league-leading sixth home run in the sixth — thanks to a lead-off home run by Mark Loretta.

Expos 10-11: In Pittsburgh, the Expos side continued with a club record of three consecutive wins in the National League.

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TODAY AT	PHILADELPHIA '1'	PHILADELPHIA '2'	PLAZA	CONCORD	GALLERIA 2	GALLERIA 1	Edman Jones Theatre
	Yusra & Ilham Shahin ... in DANTELLA (ARABIC) Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Morgan Freeman & Ashley Judd ... in KISS THE GIRLS Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	The biggest cinema production TITANIC Shows: 12:00, 3:00, 7:00, 10:30 p.m.	ISMAILIA RAYEH GAI - KAMANANA Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 Adel Imam & Yusra ... in RISALA ILA AL WALI Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 7:00, 9:00, 11:00	ABDOUN GRAND OPENING TITANIC Shows: 11:00, 2:00, 5:15, 8:30, 12:00	ABDOUN GRAND OPENING TITANIC Shows: 3:30, 7:00, 10:30 The film is also on at 12:00 a.m. on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays	ABDOUN GRAND OPENING TITANIC Shows: 3:30, 7:00, 10:30 The film is also on at 12:00 a.m. on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays

First Division Basketball Championship

Jazireh meet Ahli in playoffs tonight

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Leaders Al Jazireh meet Al Ahli tonight in the inaugural match of the First Division Basketball Championship playoffs which kick off in two rounds concluding May 1.

Titleholders Al Jazireh top the standings on score difference and are joined by Al Orthodoxy and Al Ahli in the top three who will contest the playoffs for the first time in Jordanian basketball.

Al Jazireh had beat Al Orthodoxy 92-84 and Al Ahli 75-69 in the first round which they ended with an unbeaten streak. However, they could only manage a dismal 57-53 win over Al Ahli and lost their only match to Al Orthodoxy 73-69 in the second round.

Al Jazireh and Al Orthodoxy are therefore tied in overall points and the race for the title is expected to be closely fought among the top two with Al Ahli having the lesser chance unless they manage to beat both teams in both playoff rounds.

However, judging by the results to far, last season's runners up Al Ahli seem to stand the least

chance to make the contest a three-way race.

Their inadequate pre-season training led to an inconsistent form. They started training late as they were busier tackling technical obstacles like recruiting a coach and luring back veterans Yousef Zaghoul and Marwan Ma'touq to the lineup after missing a season.

Al Orthodoxy finished third last year but demonstrated that they were in better shape to resume their dominance of the game. Their younger lineup seem in a situation to give Al Jazireh a hard time in the fight for the title.

Al Jazireh ended a 30-year domination among

the two rivals last season. Prior to that Al Orthodoxy had an undisputed reign from 1976-1989, but Al Ahli won the title in 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1994 aided by the signing of Naser Bushnaq.

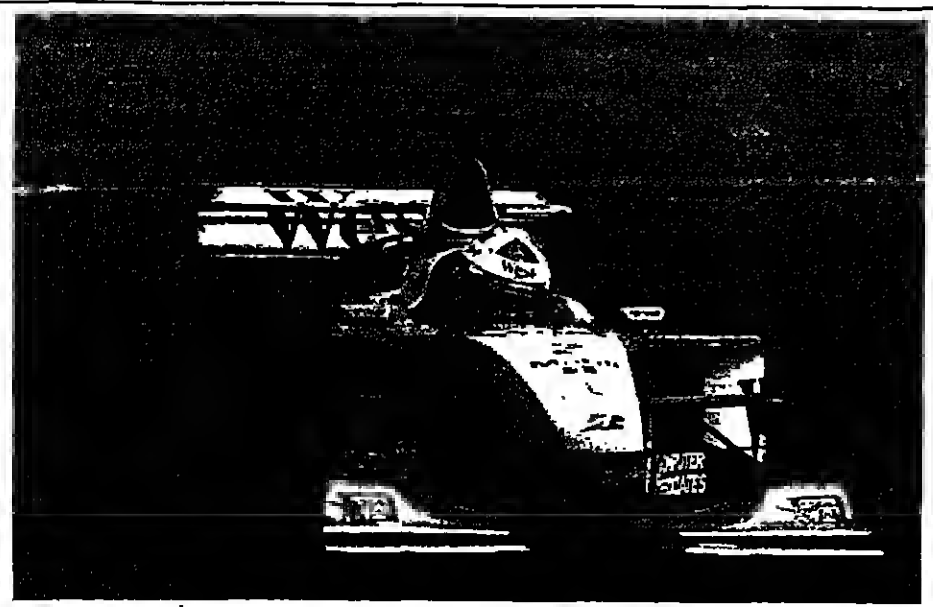
Al Orthodoxy came back to win in 1991, 1995 and 1996.

According to regulations Al Hussein have been relegated to the Second Division unless recent reports that the Jordan Basketball Federation (JBF) decided to increase First Division teams as of next season and cancel relegation this year are confirmed.

Al Jalil finished fourth and Al Jeel fifth.

STANDINGS BEFORE PLAYOFFS

Team	P	W	L	St	St	Pts
Jazireh	10	9	1	890	582	19
Orthodoxy	10	9	1	857	538	19
Ahli	10	6	4	672	606	16
Jalil	10	3	7	595	735	13
Jeel	10	3	7	558	824	13
Hussein	10	-	10	547	912	10



Scotland's Formula One driver David Coulthard drives his McLaren-Mercedes Benz around a curve at the Oscar Galvez race track during the first timed session classification at the Buenos Aires Oscar Galvez track, April 10. Coulthard clocked the fastest time with 1:28.130, followed by German Michael Schumacher and Finn Mika Hakkinen. The Argentine Formula 1 Grand Prix takes place April 12 (Reuters photo)

Yankees beat A's 17-13

NEW YORK (AP) — The Oakland A's and New York Yankees opened Yankee Stadium's 75th anniversary season with the highest scoring game ever in the stadium's history, a 17-13 Yankees' victory that was anything but Major League calibre.

Tino Martinez hit a three-run homer, drove in five runs and scored four to lead New York. The 30 combined runs eclipsed the previous high, a 17-11 win by New York over the Philadelphia Athletics on June 3, 1933.

Consider these numbers: 30 runs, 32 hits and four errors. Add to those, 10 pitchers, 18 walks, a 12-run, 23-batter fifth inning in 4 hours and 6 minutes. It's no wonder the seventh-inning stretch received one of the day's loudest ovals.

Martinez's two-run double off Jim Dougherty (0-1) came in New York's four-run fifth as the Yankees took a 16-13 lead. Scott Brosius added four RBIs and Bernie Williams scored four runs for New York, which has won three straight to reach .500 for the first time this season.

Matt Stairs had three RBIs and every regular in Oakland's lineup had scored one run and driven one in — by the end of the fifth inning.

Red Sox 9, Mariners 7: In Boston, Mo Vaughn's grand slam capped a seven-run ninth inning against Seattle's shaky bullpen and the Red Sox overcame Randy Johnson's brilliant pitching for a win over the Mariners.

Johnson struck out 15 and allowed just two hits in eight innings. But he had thrown 131 pitches and Seattle manager Lou Piniella decided to lift him.

Four relievers faced seven batters in the ninth and every one scored as the Red Sox ended a three-game losing streak by winning their home opener.

Vaughn's third homer of the season and seventh grand slam of his career went down the right-field line on an 0-1 pitch against Paul Spoljaric.

Indians 8, Angels 5, 10 innings: In Cleveland, Jim Thome hit a three-run, game-winning homer in the 10th off Troy Percival as the Indians came back to win their home opener 8-5 Friday over the Anaheim Angels.

After the Indians blew leads of 4-1 and 5-4, Thome ended the four-hour game with a line-drive homer, his first, into the frenzied masses of the standing room only patio in left.

The crowd of 42,707 — Cleveland's 212th consecutive sellout — got to party the way they've wanted to since the Indians lost Game 7 of the World Series.

The Indians raised their second AL pennant in three years and received their championship rings from Cleveland Hall of Famer Larry Doby before the game.



Lindsay Davenport

Davenport avenges loss to Kournikova

AMELIA ISLAND, Florida (AFP) — Lindsay Davenport, defeated Anna Kournikova 7-5, 6-3 Friday to reach the semi-finals of the WTA Tour event here, avenging her loss to the Russian teen in the Lipton quarter-finals.

Kournikova, 16, ousted Davenport in the quarters en route to the final at Lipton two weeks ago, where she lost to American Venus Williams.

Davenport, 21 and the top seed here, paid her back on Friday and kept alive her own campaign for a second title of the year.

Davenport defeated World No. 1 Martina Hingis of Switzerland in the finals of the Pan Pacific Open at Tokyo two months ago.

Davenport will face fourth-seeded Mary Pierce of France. Pierce, a two-time finalist here, downed Iva Majoli of Croatia 6-3, 6-2.

Sixth seed Conchita Martinez of Spain also advanced to the semi-finals with a 6-4, 7-5 victory over American Lisa Raymond.

Martinez, the 1995 champion, will meet second-seeded South African Amanda Coetzter, who beat U.S. wildcard Tara Snyder 6-4, 6-4.

Coetzter won her first title of the year at Hilton Head, South Carolina, on Sunday.

Phillies edge Braves; Cubs pound Expos

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Curt Schilling won his second matchup with Greg Maddux in a week when Mike Lieberthal singled home the only run in the bottom of the ninth inning Friday night, giving the Philadelphia Phillies a 1-0 victory over the Atlanta Braves.

In his 11th career shutout, Schilling (2-0) pitched a two-hitter and struck out 10. He walked just one.

After Maddux worked eight scoreless innings, Mike Cather (0-1) relieved to start the ninth. Gregg Jefferies and Scott Rolen walked and Lieberthal grounded a one-out single up the middle that easily scored Jefferies.

Last Sunday, Schilling outduelled Maddux for a 2-1 win at Atlanta. Schilling struck out 15 in a five-hitter, and the deciding run was unearned.

In this rematch, Maddux got 15 ground ball outs and struck out five. He allowed five hits — all singles — before being lifted after 95 pitches.

Maddux, a four-time Cy Young winner, is winless after three starts this season despite an 0.78 ERA.

Schilling has a 0.35 ERA in three starts. He has allowed just nine hits in 26 innings and struck out 34.

Cubs 13, Expos 0: In Montreal, Henry Rodriguez celebrated his return with a career-high five hits, leading Kevin Tapani and the Chicago Cubs over the Expos.

Rodriguez, traded to the Cubs last December in one of Montreal's many cost-cutting moves, hit a three-run homer that highlighted a six-run first inning.

Rodriguez got a standing ovation from the crowd of 9,982 when he singled in the ninth inning to complete his 5-for-5 evening.

He also drew a walk.

Tapani (2-1) pitched a three-hitter for his eighth career shutout. He also drove in a pair of runs.

Brant Brown gave the Cubs an early lead, homering on the first pitch of the game from Marc Vlahos (0-2). Brown drove in four runs as Chicago improved to 8-2 and dropped the Expos to 1-8.

Brewers 5, Mets 3: In Milwaukee, Jeremy Burnitz hit his major league-leading sixth homer in the Milwaukee Brewers' victory over the New York Mets.

Burnitz's line drive to center field off Dave Micki (0-1) traveled 407 feet and gave Milwaukee a 1-0 lead in the second.

Burnitz hit 27 homers last season, and is off to an even better start after nine games this year.

The Brewers, the National League newcomers who had never faced the Mets before, added four runs in the sixth — thanks to a major league record-tying three intentional walks — on two-run doubles by Marc Newfield and Mark Loreta.

Pirates 4, Marlins 1: In Pittsburgh, the Florida Marlins' unprecedented first-to-worst slide continued with a club-record ninth consecutive loss to the Pirates and rookie Jose Silva.

9 — the worst start ever for a defending World Series champion.

The worst start by a defending champion had been 1-8, an ignominious mark shared by the 1947 Cardinals, 1964 Dodgers and 1984 Orioles.

The Marlins have not won since beating the Cubs on opening day March 31 and are 0-9 in April. Their 1-9 record is a near-reversal of their 8-1 start of last season.

Padres 6, Diamondbacks 4: In San Diego, Steve Finley hit a grand slam with two outs in the ninth inning and the San Diego Padres rallied for their fifth straight win, beating the Arizona Diamondbacks.

Former Padres ace Andy Benes pitched eight strong innings and hit a home run, giving Arizona a 4-2 lead. Manager Buck Showalter then turned it over to Felix Rodriguez to open the ninth.

Rodriguez (0-1) gave up a leadoff single to Greg Vaughn and issued two outs walks to pinch-hitter Mark Sweeney and Quilvio Vera to lead the bases.

Finley connected on an 0-1 pitch for his second homer of the season.

Dan Miceli (1-0) allowed one hit and struck out four in two scoreless innings.

Dodgers 7, Astros 2: In Los Angeles, Mike Piazza became the first player to hit grand slams in consecutive games for the Los Angeles Dodgers, highlighting a victory over the Houston Astros.

Piazza's seventh career grand slam — he did not hit one all last season — came on a 3-0 pitch in the eighth inning from reliever Mike Magnante.

It marked the first time the Dodgers as a team had grand slams in consecutive games since August 1-2, 1986, when Greg Brock and Enos Cabell connected against Cincinnati's Mario Soto and John Franco at Dodger Stadium.

Ramon Martinez (2-1) struck out 10 in eight innings. He gave up two runs and four hits in eight innings. Shane Reynolds (1-1) was the loser.

Reds 18, Rockies 7: In Denver, Barry Larkin's first hit of the season highlighted an eight-run seventh inning, and the Cincinnati Reds ended a four-game losing streak by roughing up Darryl Kile and the Colorado Rockies.

Bret Boone and Chris Stynes each had four hits, including a home run. Eduardo Perez homered and drove in four runs for the Reds, who had 17 hits.

Larkin, hampered by a neck problem, had been 0-for-10 this year before his two-run double put the Reds ahead 5-4 in the seventh. Eddie Taubensee followed with an RBI single that chased Kile (1-2).

Giants 5, Cardinals 3: In San Francisco, pinch-hitter Marvin Benard singled home the go-ahead run with two outs in the eighth inning, sending the San Francisco Giants past the St. Louis Cardinals.

J.T. Snow doubled off John Frascatore (0-1) with one out and advanced on Stan Javier's groundout. Benard batted for Julian Tavaraz (1-1) and singled for a 4-3 lead.

Top seed Rafter into semifinals

CHENNAI, India (AFP) — Top seed Patrick Rafter was stretched for two hours 23 minutes by little-known German Lars Burgsmuller before advancing into the semi-finals of the Gold Flake Open with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-4, 7-5 victory.

The Australian next takes on another marathon man, Leander Paes who took one minute less to claim a 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 7-5 win over Gerard Solves of France.

Sweden's Mikael Tillstrom kept on track to successfully defend his title when he outlasted third-seeded Australian Mark Woodforde 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (7/3) in yet another close encounter that lasted nearly two hours.

And he now meets Woodforde's doubles partner Todd Woodbridge after the number two seed overcame Andrei Pavel of Romania 6-4, 6-4.

Burgsmuller made a succession of outstanding returns and Rafter was guilty of too many volley errors, and the outcome remained in the balance until the U.S. Open champion broke serve to claim the match with a crosscourt winner.

"I got mad at him," said Rafter. "Because he wasn't saying sorry when he mis-hit or got a let cord, and what that does it is gets me up. I was showing a lot of emotion out there because of that. It's just enquire."

"I would have preferred an easier match, but to win when you are not playing your best tennis is a great feeling. I'm coming off the flu and don't feel 100 per-

cent but in the third set I was very happy with my energy level and the way I lasted."

Woodforde had a more potent serve than Tillstrom and was the more aggressive competitor, but Tillstrom often punished his opponent with a succession of precision passes.

The Australian had a golden opportunity in the final set when he held a break point to lead 5-3 and serve for the match, but Tillstrom denied him with a winning volley and then broke Woodforde in the next game. All week, Paes

has struggled to maintain a good start, and his tussle with Solves who had shocked Boris Becker in the previous round, was no exception.

The Indian number one held points for a 5-1 lead, but the Frenchman fought back to earn a tiebreak. Paes levelled the match at one set all when a fine volley earned him the only break of the second set to lead 5-4. In the final set, Solves put a forehand into the net to give Paes a decisive break for 6-5.

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Iraq wants British oil meeting plan scrapped

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq's parliament on Saturday unanimously condemned Britain's "evil" plan for an international conference on expediting implementation of an enhanced U.N. "oil-for-food" deal with Baghdad.

The national assembly, which discussed the idea at the start of its spring session, said it planned to contact parliamentary unions worldwide "to uncover the evil aims" of the British proposal and to call for aborting it.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Saeed Al Sahhaf on Friday urged a boycott of the conference, which British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook has said would discuss how to implement effectively an increase in the amount of oil Iraq can sell to \$5.2 billion every six months, from the current \$2 billion.

The 250-member assembly accused Britain of trying to keep U.N. sanctions imposed on Iraq in 1990 after its invasion of Kuwait, dragging on and to by-pass a deal signed with U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in February which defused the latest crisis over U.N. weapons inspections in Iraq.

"The national assembly representing the free Iraqi people rejects the British proposal in its entirety and denounces the feverish endeavours by the London government in collusion with the American administration, which has reaped disappointment and isolation as a result of its conspiratorial stand in the latest crisis," the parliament said in a statement.

The MPs voted to adopt the statement, issued by the assembly's external affairs and legal affairs committees.

Mr. Cook said last month that the meeting grouping all key bodies, including U.N. agencies and various non-governmental groups, would look at the best ways of spending the money and at what programmes would be implemented.

"Britain is trying to capitalise on its leadership of the European Union currently to rally support to the American-British design, which is isolated from that of the rest of the world community, to by-pass Iraq's Feb. 23, 1998, agreement with the United Nations," the parliament said.

The MPs voted to adopt the statement, issued by the assembly's external affairs and legal affairs committees. The session was chaired by Deputy Speaker Ghanem Khadouri, in the absence of Speaker Saadoun Hammadi, who was on a visit to Namibia.

Speaking at an inter-parliamentary union conference in Namibia, Mr. Hammadi told reporters that Baghdad had implemented the required U.N. resolutions and the Security Council should lift the embargo.

In remarks carried by the official Iraqi News Agency, he also stressed Iraq's insistence that the deal with Mr. Annan be implemented swiftly. He said 1.5 million Iraqis had died from shortages of food and medicine since 1990.

The parliamentary statement said Britain and the United States were "seeking once again to assume the role of the controlling guardian over the international organisation [United Nations] and to discuss its affairs and implement the Security Council resolutions on Iraq outside the Council."

It accused Britain and the United States of trying to sideline Mr. Annan "after he reached a balanced political deal with Iraq, aborting the military aggression conspiracy for which the Washington-London alliance mobilised all its evil capability."

British naval forces had joined a U.S. armada which remains poised in the Gulf. But U.N. officials say a new chapter in relations with Baghdad began after the successful completion of the first round of inspections of Iraq's eight so-called presidential sites under the February deal.

Britain and the United States have accused Iraqi President Saddam Hussein of deliberately blocking the oil-for-food scheme and say he is to blame for his people's suffering.

"The London government aims from holding this so-called humanitarian conference to burden the decision to lift the embargo with conditions that Iraq will not accept so that the suffering of its people continues," the statement added.

It said Iraq had dealt positively with all proposals to implement the oil-for-food deal both in terms of the funds involved and improving its implementation to achieve the humanitarian goal.

"Talks continue between Iraq's government and the United Nations over the requirements of Iraqi crude oil exports, after the designated sum was increased, according to what suits our current national ability to pump oil," the statement said.

Iraq says it cannot meet in full the new production quota because of technical problems caused by damage during the Gulf war and the sanctions and due to low oil prices.

Albright presses Lebanon to consider Israeli pullout offer

BEIRUT (AFP) — International pressure is mounting on Lebanon to consider Israel's proposal to withdraw its troops from south Lebanon after 20 years of occupation, if its security needs are met.

A Lebanese official said Saturday that U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright sent a message to Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Bweiz, currently in Paris, urging Beirut to "seriously" study the Israeli offer.

"This proposition deserves to be studied seriously and does not contradict the peace process," Ms. Albright's message said, according to the Lebanese source.

The Israeli cabinet last week approved U.N. Security Council Resolution 425 adopted in 1978 calling for an immediate Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, but made the retreat conditional on border security arrangements with Beirut.

Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai "is sincere in his desire for a withdrawal from south Lebanon," according to Ms. Albright's message, sent to Mr. Bweiz via a U.S. diplomat in the French capital, the official said.

France, a traditional friend of Lebanon, said the Israeli offer constitutes a "positive gesture" and is a step "in the right direction," though Paris has said Resolution 425 must be applied "without condition and without delay."

French Foreign Affairs Minister spokesperson Anne Gazeau-Secret said that a "lasting peace cannot be established except in the terms of a universal, peace involving not only Israel and Lebanon but also Israel and Syria."

But Saudi Arabia on Saturday said it backed Lebanon and Syria in opposing the Israeli offer.

"The Saudi government stands with Lebanon and Syria in insisting on an unconditional withdrawal by Israel from the territories it occupies in the south of Lebanon," said the statement published by the official SPA news agency.

Riyadh also said negotiations between Israel and Syria "should resume" to unblock the Middle East peace process. Both Lebanon and Syria have rejected the Israeli security demands and said the Jewish state should comply with Resolution 425 "unconditionally."

Even before the Israeli cabinet's approval, U.N. chief Kofi Annan said that the parameters for applying U.N. resolutions could be negotiable.

"I have always maintained that Security Council resolutions were binding and must be respected and applied," he said during a visit to Israel late last month.

"But in the last analysis, it is

the parties concerned which must speak, negotiate, and accept the compromises necessary for applying the resolutions. They are not self-imposed."

In a statement released Apr. 2, the United Nations said that "respect of [any Israeli] withdrawal would require some discussions with all the concerned parties to be totally effective. The secretary general asks all parties to participate in this process."

Lebanese diplomatic sources said Saturday that the June renewal of the mandate of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) could offer the Security Council a chance to establish the parameters for applying Resolution 425.

Under Resolution 425 UNIFIL is tasked with "confirming the pullback of Israeli forces and reestablishing peace and international security" in the region.

Lebanon and Syria have called the Israeli withdrawal offer a "manoeuvre" aimed at separating the Lebanese and Syrian tracks in peace negotiations.

Syria demands that any deal on Lebanon be tied to Israeli agreement to withdraw from the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in 1967 and annexed in 1981.

Peace negotiations between Syria and Israel have been suspended since February 1996.

British carrier docks at Bahrain seaport

MINA SULMAN (AP) — The British carrier HMS Illustrious, patrolling a no-fly zone in southern Iraq, docked here Saturday to replenish the ship's supplies and give a break to its crew before leaving the Gulf.

Illustrious, which arrived in the Gulf last month, "is expected to leave shortly," said Captain Stephen Meyer, commander of the aircraft carrier.

He did not specify a date for its departure but the British embassy in Bahrain said the carrier would leave by the middle of this month.

Capt. Meyer told reporters that warplanes aboard the 20,000-tonne carrier flew several missions daily to the no-fly zone in southern Iraq and "there were no disturbances at all from the Iraqis."

"Iraqis appear to be cooperating much more with the United Nations," said Capt. Meyer.

Britain and the United States had threatened military action after Iraq refused to open suspected weapons sites to U.N. arms inspectors.

Britain is sending three Tornado fighter jets to Kuwait to replace the ill-fated Kuwait already serves as a base for nine British Tornados which were sent to the region at the height of the Iraqi standoff with the United



IN RESPECT FOR BUDDHA'S TOOTH: Female Buddhist disciples lay their long hair on the ground to show their respect to the sacred tooth of the Lord Buddha during a ceremony at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall in Taipei Saturday. Some 20,000 worshippers and officials took part in the ceremony held in honour of the tooth relic and to pray for the peace and stability of the island. The tooth relic, given to Taiwan by a Tibetan Buddhist master, is thought to be one of only three such teeth that exist in the world (Reuters photo)

Tlass: Clinton signed paper on Israeli pullout from Golan

BEIRUT (AFP) — U.S. President Bill Clinton signed a document containing an agreement by Israel's previous Labour government to withdraw from the Golan Heights, according to Syrian Defence Minister Mustapha Tlass.

"The Labour Israeli government committed to withdraw its troops to the June 4, 1967 lines, and that commitment was confirmed in a message from the president of the United States," Mr. Tlass said in an interview with the London-based Arabic newspaper Al Quds.

Al Arabi. He said the document was in the possession of Syrian President Hafez Al Assad. "I don't know when President Assad will make it public. He will decide on an opportune moment," Mr. Tlass said, according to the interview, which was carried by the Lebanese press agency Al Markaziya on Saturday.

Syria has repeatedly claimed that Israel's previous government had committed to withdrawing from the Golan Heights before its suspended peace talks in February 1996 following a wave of attacks in Israel, which killed 58 people.

The Jewish state seized the Golan Heights during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war and illegally annexed the strategic plateau in 1981.

Mr. Tlass also used the interview to launch an attack on U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

"Since this woman, this Zionist Jew, took up her post, American policy has fallen to an all-time low," he said.

Mir's cosmonauts head into open space to replace orientation engine

MOSCOW (AP) — The two Russian cosmonauts on the Mir will head into open space Saturday for the first of three such missions aimed at replacing an engine that keeps the station properly aligned toward the sun.

The old thruster engine ran out of fuel during the previous spacewalk last week, forcing the cosmonauts to rush back to the station and switch on another engine that restored the Mir's orientation.

On Saturday, the two cosmonauts — Talgat Musabayev and Nikolai Budarin — will remove the thruster, which operated since 1992. Orientation engines are not rechargeable and need to be replaced

when fuel runs out. The spacewalk is to begin shortly after 2 p.m. Moscow time, and would last for about six hours, according to Mission Control spokesman Valery Lyudin.

After dismantling the engine, the cosmonauts plan to begin repairs of the station's Elektron oxygen generator, installing a valve that would control the removal of hydrogen from the station. Later, they will proceed to repair the generator from inside the station.

The Mir doesn't suffer oxygen shortages, since the station has a second fully operational Elektron generator, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

On the next two spacewalks, scheduled for April

17 and 22, the cosmonauts will install a new orientation engine.

The third man on the Mir, NASA astronaut Andrew Thomas, will remain inside the station during this month's spacewalks, filming his colleagues' progress, as he has done in the past.

After a series of accidents and breakdowns last year, the 12-year-old Mir has been largely trouble-free in recent months.

Russian space officials hope to keep the station manned at least until next year, when a new international space station should be ready to handle a crew.

Russia and the United States are among 15 countries involved in the project.



Jackson wins slander suit

LOS ANGELES (AFP) — A jury has ruled that a man who claimed to be Michael Jackson having sex with a minor must pay the pop star \$2.7 million in damages. Jackson sued Victor Gutierrez in 1995 after Gutierrez said on television that he possessed such a videotape. Gutierrez also released a book entitled "Michael Jackson Was My Lover." Gutierrez refused to present evidence that the charges were true, citing a California law allowing journalists to protect sources' confidentiality.

Sandra Bullock gets ready for summer

NEW YORK (AP) — Sandra Bullock has declared the year of the thong. Inspired by a trip to Brazil, the actress has decided that "just once in my life, even if it's for one day, I am going to stand on the front of my boat in a thong." Bullock has been eating better and exercising since January. Eight weeks ago, she started a regime called the Zone. "It's the basic principle of balanced eating," said the reformed junk-food junkie. "I've lost 6 kgs, and I've taken 9 cm off my butt." Bullock told InStyle magazine. Bring on the thong!

Sudden stardom left Tomei jittery

NEW YORK (AP) — Marisa Tomei says her sudden stardom from "My Cousin Vinny" left her jittery. After winning an Oscar in 1993 for her second film, she said she felt "a little exposed all of a sudden, like I was just naked out there. I guess I got a little scared." That's why Tomei went against the Hollywood grain and took on quirky roles in smaller films such as "Untamed Heart" and "Unhook the Stars." "I chose to play a lot of different characters with some young directors and learn as I went along," she said in the Daily News.

Paparazzi save Rolling Stone drummer

LONDON (AFP) — Rolling Stone drummer Ron Wood had good reason to thank the paparazzi when they rescued him from a blazing pleasure boat after one of its engines blew up. Wood was one of 11 passengers on the vessel just off the Brazilian coast south of Rio de Janeiro when there was an explosion in one engine. One passenger jumped into the sea as the boat caught fire, but a pursuing boat hired by press photographers drew up and plucked them all to safety. Wood is in Brazil for the South American leg of the latest Rolling Stones' "Bridges of Babylon" tour.

Cannes Film Festival live on Internet

PARIS (AFP) — For all those unable to travel to sunny southern France, the star-struck Cannes Film Festival has decided to go virtual, transmitting live its much-awaited procession of stars on Internet. One of the highlights of the annual festival, the stars' walk up the stairs on ceremony night, should be sent round the world via the world wide web on the festival's official site: <http://www.festival-cannes.com>. Surfers will be offered 60 minutes of images of the festival each day, including press conferences, and a full description of the films running in the festival.

Thousands of Palestinians celebrate Moses and Salaheddin in annual celebration

JERICHO (AFP) — While Jews mark Passover and Christians celebrate Easter, thousands of Palestinians are praying and dancing at an Islamic and national celebration held yearly at a tomb of Moses reportedly built by the Arab hero Salaheddin.

Some 20,000 Palestinians from all over the West Bank have gathered to the tomb of Moses outside the town of Jericho in the Jordan Valley for the two weeks of celebrations, which began Friday.

"This place holds a both religious and a political meaning at the same time,"

said Hassan Al Shbeib, a resident of Jericho who joined the celebrations.

"Politically, the celebration underlines that the Palestinian lands are Islamic and Arab, despite Israeli attempts to seize the land and claim it as Jewish," Mr. Shbeib told AFP.

The combined meaning of the celebration is centred around the tomb, one of several in the area said to contain the remains of the Prophet Moses, revered by Muslims as well as Jews and Christians.

The Arab ruler Salaheddin

is said to have built the tomb, one of a number of Islamic religious monuments built after conquering Jerusalem in 1187 from the Crusaders, to compete with sites to which Christian pilgrims flocked.

"We are restoring the glory of Salaheddin and following in the tradition which he set down for all Muslims," said Sheikh Mohammad Ismail Al Jamal.

Large crowds have turned out for decades at Moses' Tomb for his "mawlid" or birthdate, marked by Muslim mystics. The Sufis, who hold

annual commemorations at many tombs of religious figures.

This year, the occasion coincided with the eight-day Jewish Passover in Israel and with Easter celebrations which have attracted thousands of Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem.

In the past two years, Palestinian National Authority has taken control of the celebration, providing security and organising the event so that each day a different town in the West Bank sends participants.

Friday was supposed to set

aside for Jericho and Jerusalem residents, but Palestinians from throughout the West Bank showed up, with families setting up picnics and smoking waterpipes inside the tomb's 316 rooms and outside its walls.

Sufi groups held ritual chants outside, swaying to rhythmic music and chanting the name of Allah, while a more secular horde of peddlers descended on the event to sell trinkets and sweets to the crowd.

Even barbers show up, due to some traditions which place blessings on getting a

haircut during the religious feast.

"I've come here for years because there's always great demand," said one barber, Ezzat Al Zureidi, who came the 140 kilometre trip from the West Bank town of Tulikarem for the occasion.

Masoud Eid, 75, said he remembered the older days of the celebration, which had a "different taste to them."

"All the families of Jerusalem would drive in caravans of camels and borses to Jericho, with Sufi dancers and mock battles with swords and staffs.

Families would camp out at the tomb for days," Mr. Eid said.

Hajja Um Shawqat, an elderly woman from Tulikarem, said she had come to celebration for purely religious reasons. "It is a blessing to visit this tomb, just like it is to pray at Al Aqsa," she said, referring to Islam's third holiest site in Jerusalem's Old City.

In some Islamic traditions, the Prophet Mohammad is said to have passed by this tomb of Moses during his mystical journey from Mecca to Al Aqsa.

World
Israeli attacks guerrilla bases
ABABYEH (AP) — Israeli soldiers
guerrilla positions in southern
Two Israeli jets fired six air to
in hills near the desert village of
a Hizbullah stronghold in southern
border enclave in southern
security officials speaking
of about 100 guerrillas in the
from the stricken area, but there
word on casualties from the
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of guerrillas. The area is used
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Volume 23 Number 6809
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Christians
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of extra police and
were deployed
of the threat of terror
in the Holy City.
are celebrating
of Jerusalem, said
the holidays signify
from sin and
An Iraqi child
ments of amor
life and peace
to have the
God for freedom
that life is a
this Holy Land
times Jews and
which have had
abundant life
also from Jesus
Orthodox Christians
which celebrate
week. In the
Holy Sepulchre
of the Church of
palm branches
through the East
singing in Arabic.
"It is rather like
a religious feast
German Jews
Jerusalem for the
Christians, the
and the surround-
inner part where a
now Sunday, the
people had craved
ancient church, a
sign of Sabbath pre-
mass from a
dered while they
together are pray-
faith in the risen
Christ," he added.